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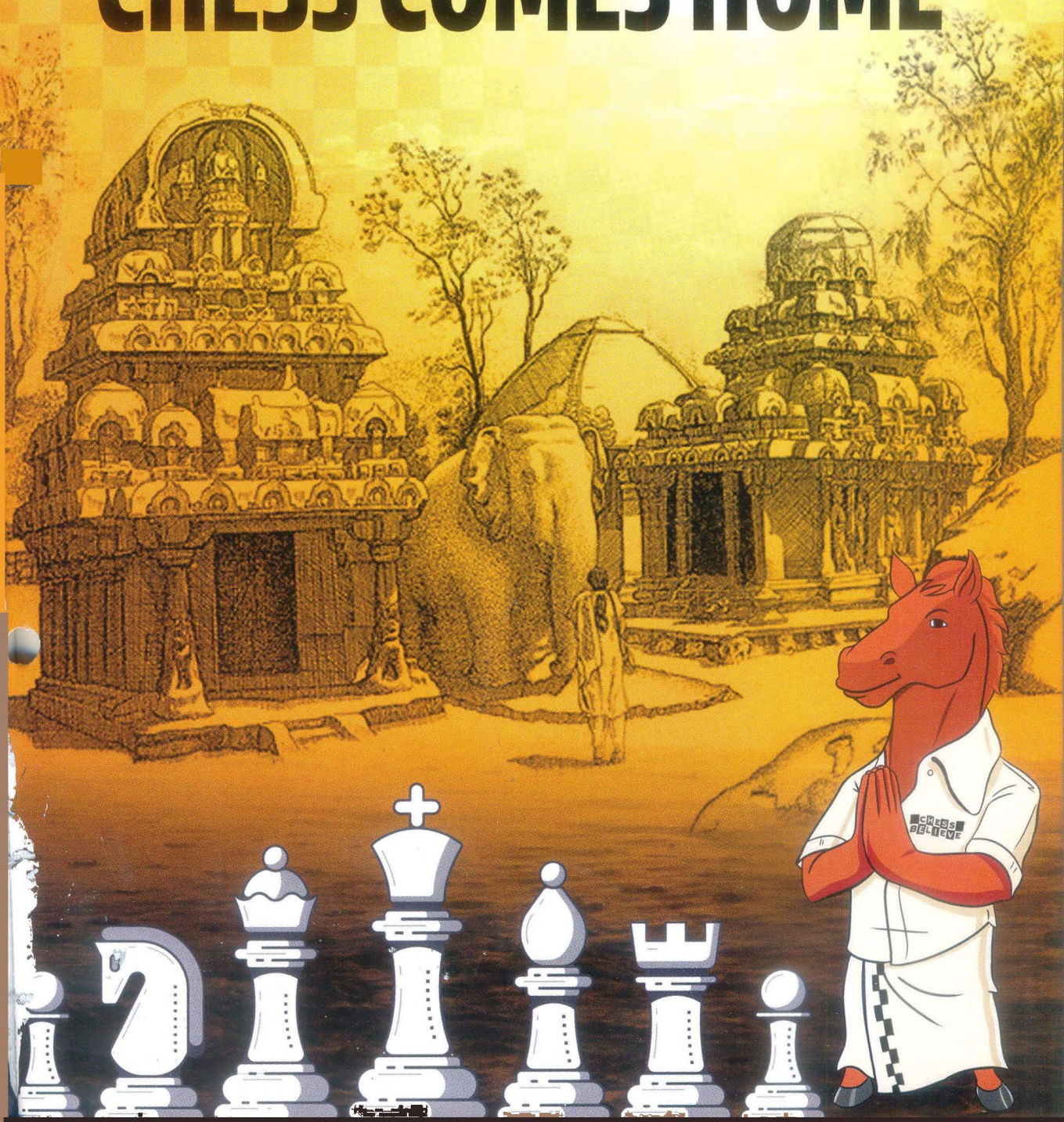

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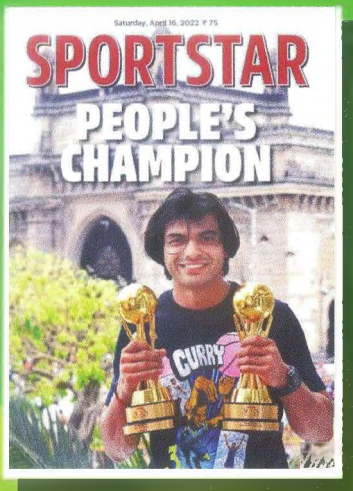

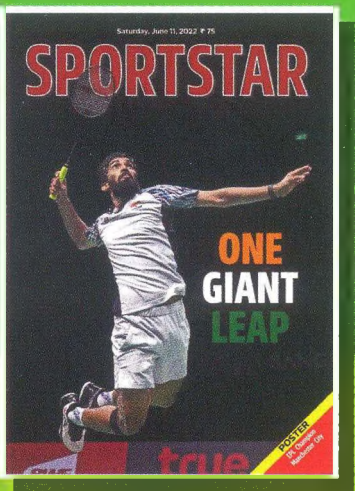

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SPORTSTAR

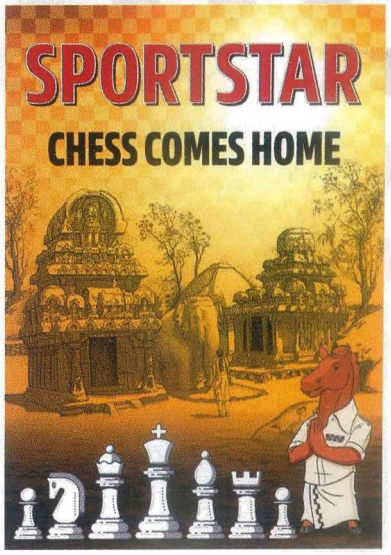
72 **For the first time, India is seeded to be among the medallists.** On several occasions, India has played the Olympiad without spearhead Viswanathan Anand, but this time, the five-time World champion dons the role of a mentor for the home team. A preview of the Open section, where U.S. is the hot favourite.

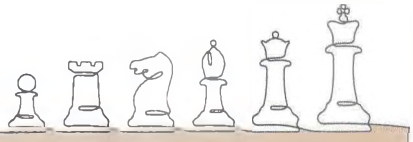
76 **India's dream of a podium finish in the women's Chess Olympiad could well become a reality at home.** Though seeded No. 1 in the absence of China and Russia, India will have to tread very carefully to beat a very strong field while watching out for threats all along.

VISWANATHAN ANAND

80 **The king's advice to the Indian youngsters —** Lower your expectations and not go into this Olympiad thinking it's great. If you start thinking that you're much stronger than you are, and that you have to perform much higher than it's reasonable to expect, then you can end up putting a lot of pressure on yourself.

82 **India is fielding three men's teams and two women's teams** and has a very good chance of finishing on the podium in both sections. A look at the composition of the teams.





From the Editor's Desk

The 44th Chess Olympiad has found a perfect home in the ancient Pallava Dynasty port city of Mahabalipuram, just on the outskirts of Chennai.

The seventh and eighth century temples of Mamallapuram – an UNESCO World Heritage Site – offers the grandest setting for the cerebral game, the origin of which can be traced back to India.

The Masters of the game from 187 countries will be locked in an intense battle of skills, wit and grit, with host India looking to make the most of its home advantage.

This special twin section of the *Sportstar* will surely hold the interest of the chess connoisseurs as well as those who move pieces for the fun of it.

Ayon Sengupta

sportstar.thehindu.com sportstarweb sportstar@thehindu.co.in

Top contenders: With Fabiano Caruana and Wesley So (in pic), and Levon Aronian – ranked fourth to sixth in world rankings – along with 14th ranked Leiner Dominguez Perez and 26th ranked Sam Shankland completing the line-up, it appears almost futile to look beyond this U.S. combination for the gold medal. GETTY IMAGES

Fasten your seatbelts for some racy, thrilling action

RAKESH RAO

Even the best can have an off day and in a format of this kind, an outcome of a key contest could decide the **colour of the medal** or even keep a formidable-looking side off the podium.

The U.S. — much like the erstwhile Soviet Union, and later Russia — carries an aura of invincibility leading up to the 44th Chess Olympiad. Without a doubt the strongest contender for gold in the Open section, USA is made to look unstoppable in the absence of Russia and China.

With Fabiano Caruana, Wesley So and Levon Aronian — ranked fourth to sixth in world rankings — along with 14th ranked Leiner Dominguez Perez and 26th ranked Sam Shankland completing the line-up, it appears almost futile to look beyond this U.S. combination for the gold medal. Remember, this air of invincibility is despite World No. 11 Hikaru Nakamura opting to stay away. Mercifully, in sports, favourites do not necessarily walk away as winners. Even the best can have an off day and in a format of this kind, an outcome of a key contest could decide the colour of the medal or even keep a formidable-looking side off the podium.

Azerbaijan, India 'A'' and Norway could pose a challenge to the U.S. But, let us not take anything away from the mighty top seeded combination.

For Azerbaijan, the form of top-ranked Shakhriyar Mamedyarov could be a concern but this trusted soldier, along with Teimour Radjabov, provides a sense of assurance on the top two boards. Rauf Memedov and Gadir Guseinov on the two lower boards could well prove to be the 'strikers' the

team will look up to.

For the first time, India is seeded to be among the medallists. On several occasions, India has played the Olympiad without spearhead Viswanathan Anand, but this time, the five-time World champion dons the role of a mentor for the home teams. With P. Harikrishna striking form and Vidit Gujrathi providing the confidence on the second board, a lot can be expected from the in-form debutant Arjun Erigaisi on the third board. This rising star has done well against those rated 2600+ and his form could prove to be the cutting edge India needs to pull off key matches. S. L. Narayanan and the seasoned K. Sasikiran are expected to provide solidity, when required, on the lower boards. N. Srinath, the youngest among the five Indian coaches, is attached with this team.

Though 11th seed India 'B' is not among the medal favourites, look out for some excitement each time this young side plays a top-10 team. Nihal Sarin, D. Gukesh, B. Adhiban, R, Praggnanandhaa and Raunak Sadhwani form a combination capable of embarrassing quite a few names from the higher rated teams. Gukesh, Praggnanandhaa and Raunak have shown fine touch in recent weeks. Should Nihal Sarin and Adhiban, 'the beast', find their true form during the Olympiad, this could well be the team to watch out for. How noted coach R. B. Ramesh manages their workload remains to be seen.

In fact, thanks to the odd-numbered entries, India gained an opportunity to field a third team. Seeded 17th, the India 'C' team, comprising Surya Shekhar Ganguly, M. Karthikeyan, S. P. Sethuraman, Abhijeet Gupta and Abhimanyu Puranik, has all players rated over 2600. With Tejas Bakre as a coach, the team boasts of a fair amount of strength. But for this team to be noticed, it is pertinent for the players to strike form when it matters.

Coming back to the medal contenders, Norway enjoys the fourth seeding mainly because of Magnus Carlsen whose rating of 2864 — 92 points more than the second best player, Aryan Tari, and over 300 points more than the fifth member of the team —

Home advantage: For the first time, India is seeded to be among the medallists. With P. Harikrishna striking form and Vidit Gujrathi providing the confidence on the second board, a lot can be expected from India 'A'. THE HINDU PHOTO LIBRARY

Solo star: Norway enjoys the fourth seeding mainly because of Magnus Carlsen whose rating is 2864. However, it could find it tough to justify its seeding. AFP

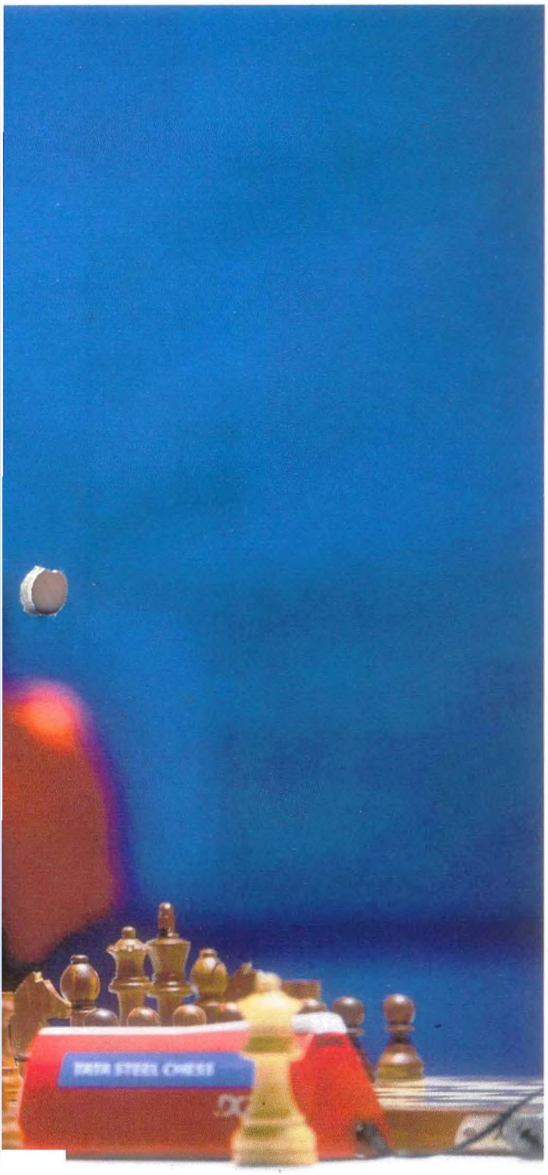
dramatically raises the average rating of the team. It must be said that Jon Ludvig Hammer and Johan-Sebastian Christiansen are also pretty strong on the lower boards. However, Norway could find it tough to justify its seeding.

There is very little to choose between Spain and Poland, seeded five and six. Spain looks better balanced with its top four players rated between 2702 and 2675. Francisco Vallejo Pons, seasoned Alexie Shirov and David Anton hold the key to Spain's prospects, much like Jan-Krzysztof Duda and Radoslaw Wojtaszek on the top two boards for Poland. Again, the importance of having two strong players on the lower boards cannot be overemphasised.

This is where the Netherlands' experience on the two lower boards could come handy. The seventh seed has Anish Giri and Jorden van Foreest but Erwin L'Ami and Benjamin Bok will have to play their part on the last two boards for the team to stay in medal contention.

Former champion Ukraine may not carry that intimidating look of the past but continues to be a potent threat to any team. Though Andrei Volokitin, a key member of the 2004 gold-winning team, is still around, the side is fairly balanced with Anton Korobov spearheading the campaign, and even the fourth strongest player, Yuriy Kuzubov, is rated 2642.

Similarly, Germany also presents a



strong challenge with young Vincent Keymer leading the side with no player rated lower than 2642.

England relies on the tested quartet of Michael Adams, Luke McShane, David Howell and Gawain Jones — all rated between 2696 and 2652 — in its bid for a medal.

Overall, after the initial rounds, expect most decisive matches among top 20 teams to reflect a one-point winning margin. Gone are the days when even some of the stronger players were happy to draw with black pieces instead of stretching harder for a win. Watch out for some flamboyant, young turks to make life difficult for many seasoned names. In short, fasten your seatbelts for some racy, thrilling action.

The top-10 teams

1. USA (average rating 2711) — Fabiano Caruana (2783), Wesley So (2773), Levon Aronian (2775), Leinier Dominguez Perez (2754) and Sam Shankland (2720).

2. Azerbaijan (2705) — Shakhriyar Mamedyarov (2759), Teimour Radjabov (2738), Rauf Memedov (2656), Gadir Guseinov (2668) and Vasif Durarbayli (2638).

3. India A (2696) — P. Harikrishna (2720), Vidit Gujrathi (2714), Arjun Erigaisi (2689), S. L. Narayanan (2659) and K. Sasikiran (2638).

4. Norway (2692) — Magnus Carlsen (2864), Aryan Tari (2672), Jon Ludvig Hammer (2638), Johan-Sebastian Christiansen (2593) and Olsen Urkedal Forde Olav (2555).

5. Spain (2687) — Francisco Vallejo Pons (2702), Alexie Shirov (2704), David Anton (2667), Jaime Santos Latasa (2675) and Eduardo Iturrizaga Bonelli (2611).

6. Poland (2683) — Jan-Krzysztof Duda (2750), Radoslaw Wojtaszek (2708), Kacper Piorun (2636), Wojciech Moranda (2636) and Mateusz Bartel (2597).

7. The Netherlands (2672) — Anish Giri (2760), Jorden van Foreest (2678), Erwin L'Ami (2634), Benjamin Bok (2616) and Max Warmerdam (2610).

8. Ukraine (2666) — Anton Korobov (2692), Kirill Shevchenko (2654), Andrei Volokitin (2674), Volodymyr Onyshchuk (2612) and Yuriy Kuzubov (2642).

9. Germany (2664) — Vincent Keymer (2686), Matthias Buebaum (2673), Rasmus Svane (2649), Liviu-Dieter Nisipeanu (2642) and Dimitrij Kollars (2648).

10. England (2662) — Michael Adams (2696), Luke McShane (2649), David Howell (2650), Gawain Jones (2652) and Ravi Haria (2505).

Finish-till-the-finish

What makes the **medal-race** in the women's section interesting is the lack of consistency among most teams.

Pinning hopes: Indian team mentor Viswanathan Anand has a word with Koneru Humpy during the launch of the torch relay for the 44th Chess Olympiad. India has a very good chance of finishing on the podium in the tournament. PTI

RAKESH RAO

India's dream of a podium finish in the women's Chess Olympiad could well become a reality at home. Though seeded No. 1 in the absence of China and Russia, India will have to tread very carefully to beat a very strong field while watching out for threats all along.

Playing at home has its advantages but on the downside is the challenge to deal with the mounting expectations. The talk of medals dominates most conversations around the players and that's where coaches Abhijit Kunte and Swapnil Dhopade have a huge role to play.

With the host having the right to field a minimum of two teams, India 'A' has the creamy layer with K. Humpy, mother-to-be D. Harika, R. Vaishali, Tania Sachdev and Bhakti Kulkarni forming the team. Humpy's presence at the top is most reassuring. The coach will have to take a call on Harika's services depending on the importance of the match and equally, how she feels on a given day. Debutant Vaishali brings an exciting dimension with her dynamic style. A former medallist Tania, playing her seventh Olympiad, has the expertise and the experience to deal with challenges of the lower boards. Bhakti's form could play a very important part should any of the top players show signs of struggle.

India 'B', seeded 12, will be watched with interest since the team presents a strange mix. Rising stars Vantika Agarwal and National champion Divya Deshmukh find themselves in the company of vastly experienced trio of top-rated Padmini Rout, Soumya Swaminathan and Mary Ann Gomes. Going by the inconsistencies in performances in women's chess, this combination could prove to be quite a handful for the opposition provided the team settles

Handling pressure: Abhijit Kunte with the Indian women's team comprising Mary Ann Gomes, Bghakti Kulkarni, R. Vaishali, Tania Sachdev and Dronavalli Harika, which won the silver medal at the FIDE World Women's Team Chess Championship in 2021. FIDE.COM

down quickly with an effective combination. With this team carrying lesser weight of expectations, expect this team to pull off some high-scoring victories in the initial rounds.

There is very little to choose between former champions Ukraine and Georgia, two nations who have done fairly consistently in the competition.

Led by the former women's World champion Mariya Muzychuk, Ukraine has won a medal in every Olympiad since 2012. Winner in 2006, the team almost regained the gold in 2018 but lost out to China on tie-breaker and finished with a silver.

Mariya's sister, Anna is the second strongest player in the squad. Anna, only the fourth player in women's chess to reach 2600 in rating, is a former World championship runner-up and winner of the world rapid and blitz titles. Anna Ushenina is another former women's world champion in the team. With two other players also rated over 2400, this Ukraine combination should be seen as a co-favourite for the gold.

Four-time winner Georgia, placed just three points behind Ukraine in average ratings of the players, is the other serious contender for the gold. Top ranked Nana Dzagnidze, Lela Javakhishvili, Nino Batsiashvili and Meri Arabidze are rated between 2531 and 2426. This is a fair indication of the team's capabilities.

One team that is likely to test the big three is the young combination from Kazakhstan. Seeded four, Kazakhstan presents the trio of 2017 World junior girls champion Zhansaya Abdumalik (age 22), 2016 World junior girls' winner Dinara Saduakassova (25) and the reigning World women's blitz champion Bibisara Assaubayeva (18). Like some of the Indian boys during the past two

Tough contender: Led by the former women's World champion Mariya Muzychuk, Ukraine has won a medal in every Olympiad since 2012. Winner in 2006, the team almost regained the gold in 2018 but lost out to China on tie-breaker and finished with a silver. AP

years, these Kazakh girls have done well in the shorter-format online events and have caught the eye of the world elite. Look out for this team.

Poland is one of those teams which can prove most dangerous, if taken lightly. The fifth seed has Alina Kashlinskaya rated over 2500 while Monika Socko is next at 2416. The possibility of Oliwia Kiolbasa and Maria Malicka coming hard at the lower boards looms large.

France continues to rely on the experienced duo of Marie Sebag and Sophie Millet. Much like Poland, France too expects to strike on the lower boards through Pauline Guichard, Anastasia Savina and Andreea Novrotescu. Clearly, France has the combination that most teams fear.

Matching France's strength is Azerbaijan with Gunay Mammadzada leading the way. The team, with two International Masters, three Women Grandmasters and their rating spanning from 2455 to 2344, can be expected to go far.

USA, seeded eight, has Irina Krush, Carissa Yip and the vastly-experienced Anna Zatonskih but looks beatable. Germany can prove to be a handful but Elisabeth Paehtz needs a lot of support from her teammates to threaten any of the higher-ranked teams.

Former World champion Antoeneta Stefanova leads the Bulgarian charge. Nurgyul Salimova looks capable on the second board but thereafter, the team lacks the depth to appear as a serious challenger.

Unlike in the Open section where there are far more teams in serious medal contention, the women's field has a few teams that are clearly way stronger. But what makes the medal-race in the women's section interesting is the lack of consistency among most teams. Draw-offer is a rarity and usually, finish-till-the-finish is the way to follow.

Do expect some of the established teams to hold sway but do not rule out surprises along the way.

The top-10 teams

1. India A (average rating 2486) — K. Humpy (2586), D. Harika (2517), R. Vaishali (2442), Tania Sachdev (2399) and Bhakti Kulkarni (2373).

2. Ukraine (2478) — Mariya Muzychuk (2540), Anna Muzychuk (2529), Anna Ushenina (2423), Yuliia Osmak (2420) and Nataliya Buksa (2401).

3. Georgia (2475) — Nana Dzagnidze (2531), Lela Javakhishvili (2476), Nino Batsiashvili (2466), Meri Arabnidze (2426) and Salome Melia (2384).

4. Kazakhstan (2441) — Zhansaya Abdumalik (2495), Dinara Saduakassova (2435), Bibisara Assaubayeva (2436), Meruert Kamalidenova (2397) and Guliskhan Nakhbayeva (2329).

5. Poland (2423) — Alina Kashlinskaya (2505), Monika Socko (2416), Oliwia Kiolbasa (2376), Maria Malicka (2393) and Mchalina Rudzinska (2315).

6. France (2400) — Marie Sebag (2447), Sophie Millet (2396), Pauline Guichard (2379), Anastasia Savina (2377) and Andreea Navrotescu (2373).

7. Azerbaijan (2399) — Gunay Mammadzada (2455), Kahnim Balajayeva (2344), Govhar Baydullayeva (2390), Gulnar Mammadova (2380) and Uliviyya Fataliyeva (2372).

8. USA (2390) — Irina Krush (2430), Carissa Yip (2416), Anna Zatonskih (2383), Gulrukhbegim Tokhirjonova (2329) and Tatev Abrahamyan (2291).

9. Germany (2383) — Elisabeth Paehtz (2484), Marie Klek Hanna (2366), Dinara Wagner (2341), Josefine Heinemann (2321) and Jana Schneider (2342).

10. Bulgaria (2367) — Antoaneta Stefanova (2467), Nurgyul Salimova (2416), Gergana Peycheva (2295), Gabriela Antova (2275) and Viktoria Radeva (2289).

Star presence: Anna Muzychuk, Mariya's sister, is only the fourth player in women's chess to reach 2600 in rating, is a former World championship runner-up and winner of the world rapid and blitz titles. GETTY IMAGES

Expect more drama from India's Team B

VISWANATHAN ANAND

Lower your expectations and not go into this **Olympiad thinking it's great.** If you start thinking that you're much stronger than you are, and that you have to perform much higher than it's reasonable to expect, then you can end up putting a lot of pressure on yourself.

It's Chess Olympiad time and I can feel the buzz, not just in my home State but everywhere I've travelled during the past month.

Organising an event of this magnitude, that too at such a short notice, is simply incredible. All credit to the steps taken by the Tamil Nadu Government and the All India Chess Federation.

It is obvious for the Indian fans to be excited about the prospects of our teams. In my view, it's highly desirable to minimise errors. I mean, every match here or there that goes awry will have a stress on you. It's also part of the normal tournament calendar format. But, hopefully, we'll have a smooth ride in the sense that even if we have a 2.5-1.5 win, and we have a lot of them, then we're steadily scoring points. I'm happy that with all the fresh faces we have, may be, they will be able to win games so that even the odd defeat does not hurt the team. They all seem to push and take a fair amount of risk. So it'll be choppy. If they're winning games, that's all that counts. I think in most matches, we should go in with a sense of danger, but not be pessimistic, either.

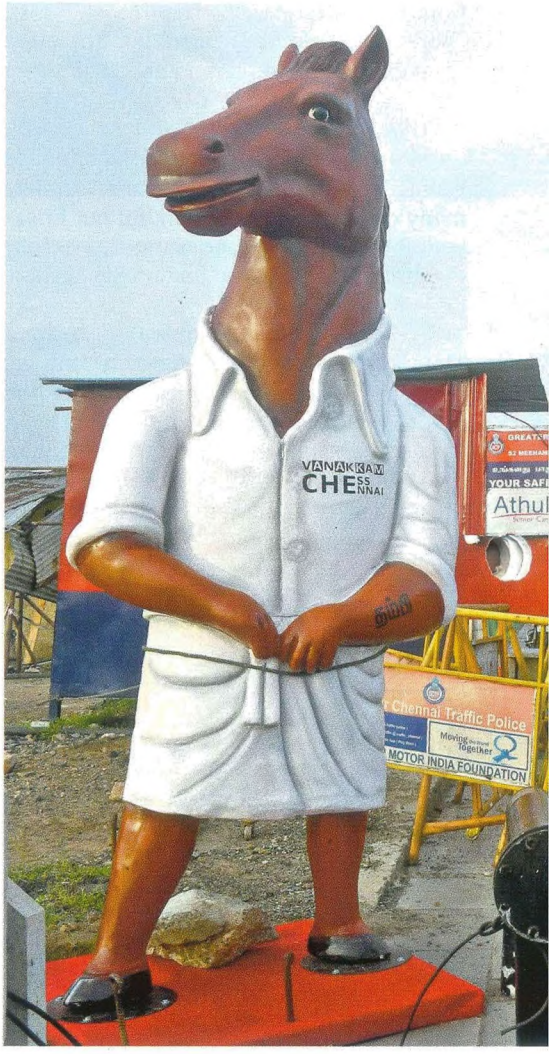
I, as a mentor of the teams, will be in touch with them. Hopefully, they will feel free to reach out to me, if they have work here or there. I have noticed, though, that most people — and this is true for me as well — that when we are there, we have our own preparation, our own notes. And mostly we're trying to get familiar with this stuff. So, I don't expect they'll have the energy or the time to keep asking people for help. If I help them, they will have to absorb that and so on. But, may be, more to cheer up the team as well. I'll be there in case the trainers have any problems that they want to work with.

Some of the players feel free to confide in me. But you know, during the Olympiad, most of the time they will be busy in their own thoughts.

Everyone is looking at the U.S. as the rating favourite, which it is.

When India plays the U.S., I won't have any particular word of advice. I mean, everyone knows what a strong opponent it will be on every board. They've faced them before, so it's nothing special. Again U.S. being the favourite by rating doesn't mean anything in the end. You have to collect your points, you have to win games. And the advantage the U.S. has is, it's likely to happen on at least one of the four boards in every match, because there's such a strong team. I think we've got good players on every board who can pose a threat to anyone. So just go with confidence and enjoy that match.

Now that it is confirmed that India will



field three teams in the Open section, it adds to the home interest. In terms of pure strength, the youngsters (in Team B) are quite strong. I would only say that Team A has more experienced people. In Team A, we know which are the boards that are not going to cause any drama and then we have the dangerous guys.

Whereas in Team B there might be too much drama, but that's not a bad thing. I can't say what experience counts for in an Olympiad — may be knowing what crunch moments are or what to do when your team is doing badly. These experiences shape you, but honestly, you figure this out pretty fast. So I think Team B will have more drama every day. Among the women, our Team A is stronger with Koneru Humpy, Dronavalli Harika, R. Vaishali, Tania Sachdeva and Bhakti Kulkarni. The second team has a lot of experience and I noticed during the camp (in Chennai) that they all were training very hard. Everyone is very motivated.

I think the main hope is that they shine. It's great that many more of them will get a chance to play in this Olympiad because of the extended number of teams. I hope that many of them will be inspired by the setting. We have Divya Deshmukh, Vantika Agrawal... and Padmini Rout is coming. They're all experienced, they all have been playing and training everywhere.

We have to note that Divya and Vantika are still young. Nonetheless, Tania and a few others are quite experienced, they play in a lot of tournaments. And I'm hoping that the occasion gets something out of them. And we have a nice surprise there.

We all know (mother-to-be) Harika is very strong. If she is able to play, then it's nice. Then the whole team can relax a bit more, and it takes some pressure off. It would be quite important to see how much she is actually able to play. I don't know if she's just very motivated or slightly deluding herself now, because this is quite a life-changing phase. I don't know in what stage she'll be at play. Amid all the rising expectations, I would counsel the players that mileage can vary. It would bother me a lot if people around are kind of euphoric, more than just talking about medals and so on, which is hopelessly unrealistic at this stage. It's hopelessly unrealistic even during the tournament. It's only during the last two or three rounds when we even permit ourselves the luxury.

You can't control what others say. I would advise players to just ignore this. But this is a social media generation. So I don't even know how to tell them not to take all these things. Let me put it this way. I would not pay attention to people cheering for medals and all because you know, that's what fans do, right? But a player should not be thinking about that, because it's way too premature for that. I think if you can ignore that, lower your expectations and not go into this Olympiad thinking it's great, then actually playing in your home country is a huge advantage. If you start thinking that you're much stronger than you are, and that you have to perform much higher than it's reasonable to expect, then you can end up putting a lot of pressure on yourself. So even when I'm there, I'll hopefully remind them. I'll have to find a way to put it, but it's quite annoying that people just say only medal... only gold. I would find it very distracting.

All geard up: Thambi, the official mascot of the chess Olympiad keeps a close eye on the traffic at GST Road, near the Chennai airport. The Olympiad will begin from July 28.
R. RAVINDRAN

Meet the INDIAN STARS

RAKESH RAO

Here's a **brief sketch** of the members of the Indian Olympiad teams.

India 'A':

P. Harikrishna — One among the country's most seasoned campaigners, World No. 25 Harikrishna will be the highest rated Indian in the competition. Whether he gets to play on the top board or lower will be known once the board-order is submitted on the eve of the competition. During his illustrious international career, now into the third decade, this 36-year-old won the Asian title after becoming the country's youngest Grandmaster in 2001, the year he claimed the Commonwealth title. He went on to win the 2004 World junior championship. He gained his best world ranking of 10 in November 2016. Over the years, apart from the World and Continental team championships, Harikrishna also turned up for several team league events in Europe. His inputs will be of immense value to the team. His form was a concern this year, but the way he bounced back to win the Prague Masters in June was a sign of his insatiable hunger for success. The triumph also reinforced his place as the second strongest Indian chess player in the world. With India seeded to be among the medals, the 2720-rated Harikrishna could realise his dream of being a member of a medal-winning team in this home edition.

Vidit Gujrathi — This 26-year old is the face of modern Indian chess players. Vidit has proved that managing performance and popularity is not such a difficult challenge. He is articulate, streams online regularly, and interacts with his growing number of fans like no other male chess player in the country. Captain of the Indian team that shared the gold medal with Russia in the 2020 Online Chess Olympiad, Vidit has maintained his rating with some consistent play. His skills in the shorter duration of the game, too, have found a steady stream of admirers. The current chess lovers of the country find it easy to connect with this Nashik-based Grandmaster. Playing his third Olympiad, Vidit will be keen to make amends for an ordinary show in 2018. He also needs no reminding that much rides on his form as India eyes another podium finish. Over the past few years, Vidit has faced some of the elite players of the world in both over-the-board and online competitions. Since the last Olympiad in 2018, Vidit won the 2019 Biel International title, was runner-up in 2020 Prague Chess Festival and was a quarterfinalist of the 2021 World Cup. Given his positional understanding, Vidit can prove equal to any player in the world. The nation will be looking to him to play a crucial role in India's campaign.

Arjun Erigaisi — Seldom has an Indian talent done so much so soon to catch the attention of the chess elite. This 18-year-old has gate-crashed into the elite of the country's rating list to be part of the India 'A' team with some awe-inspiring performances in the past year. With the Covid restrictions in place, Arjun used the time to sharpen his skills. When the action resumed, he was ready to take on the world. Imagine a player jumping from 2567 to 2689 in 12 months! Arjun did it just from July 1, 2021. He not only broke into the top-100 of the world but also went further into the top-50! He maintained a fine balance between the online competitions and the classical tournaments. He faced the best in rapid and blitz competitions like the Tata Steel in Kolkata

and finished ahead of Levon Aronian in rapid and was second best in blitz. Came the Tata Steel Challengers in Wijk aan Zee and Arjun justified his top billing with a jaw-dropping score of 10.5/13 and earned praise from Magnus Carlsen. He carried on by winning the National championship and the Delhi International Open. He returned to the Champions Chess Tour's event where he finished second in the FTX Road to Miami prelims but lost to Aronian in the quarterfinals. Given Arjun's fine form across formats, one expects him to save his best for the Olympiad. With two positional players like Harikrishna and Vidit in the team, the skill-sets of Arjun could well come handy on the third board, in making that winning difference to India's fortunes.

S. L. Narayanan — At a time when Indian chess is witnessing a sea of teen talents grabbing attention with some sterling performances, this 25-year-old from Thiruvananthapuram quietly sneaked into the top-six bracket, ahead of the more followed teen-duo of Nihal Sarin and R. Praggnanandhaa. He has rightfully earned his place in the team after a series of consistent performances in the second half of 2021. Coached in his younger years by veteran International Master Varugeese Koshy, Narayanan has blossomed into a player with sound fundamentals and has an eye for astute execution of plans. It is easy to underestimate his prospects in a tournament but make no mistake, he is far more eager to make every opportunity count. He has had a tough journey so far as a chess player and his street-fighter instincts are proof of how be battles to convert half-chances into a winning result. In his first Olympiad, Narayanan can be expected to go full throttle for the sake of the team. He knows the team management could be tempted to field the squad's most experienced member — K. Sasikiran — in his place in the key encounters. Armed with a rating of 2659, Narayanan has a well-rounded game and one can expect him to rise to the occasion.

K. Sasikiran — At 41, he is the team's most experienced and bankable player. No wonder then, he also gets to play a record-extending 11th Olympiad. With over 100 games in the Olympiad, Sasikiran is back to serving the interests of the Indian team. In fact, in India's only medal-winning campaign, in 2014, Sasikiran claimed an individual silver to make the occasion even more memorable. Though Sasikiran is no longer as active a player as he once was, he is hugely admired for his positional understanding. His passion for the game comes through each time he plays in tournaments. He remains fiercely competitive and a student of the game. In fact, when Sasikiran played as the fifth player in the team in the 2018 Olympiad, he emerged as the only Indian with five victories and contributed six points from eight games on the fourth board. Last year, Sasikiran won the Rilton Winners' Cup and this April, displayed the fire of old in winning the Fagerness International chess title. Given his form, Sasikiran looks set to give it all as he realistically aims to become the first Indian to win two Olympiad team medals.

N. Srinath (coach): When the average age of the squad is 29 and the age of the coach is 28, it does appear amusing. But, in the case of Srinath, he has the credentials to fit into the role rather well. After playing his part to perfection in the 2020 Online Chess Olympiad, Srinath is seen as an integral part of All India Chess Federation's scheme of things. Having coached Nihal Sarin, besides the current National champions Arjun Erigaisi and Divya Deshmukh — all members of the Indian Olympiad teams — Srinath has truly earned his stripes.

India 'B'

Nihal Sarin — One from the new generation of teen champions who has played his part in giving India a new identity as a grow-

ing chess power. Nihal is part of the pack that includes Arjun Erigaisi, D. Gukesh, R. Praggnanandhaa, Raunak Sadhwani and few more who have made the chess world sit up and take notice of the quality of talent produced in India in the past few years. Nihal, like the few named above, did not take long to complete the stipulations required to become a Grandmaster and continued to make steady progress. As Anand once mentioned, "someone told me that when I play practice games with these youngsters, I am actually playing some very tough opposition." That's some tribute from the legend to the high quality of chess these talents produce so regularly. In the 2018 Tata Steel rapid event in Kolkata, Nihal made heads turn when he drew with Viswanathan Anand, Shakhriyar Mamedyarov, Sergey Karjakin, P. Harikrishna, Vidit Gujrathi and Surya Shekhar Ganguly. As Anand later said, "He's a huge talent from what I've seen of him." Rated 2651, Nihal is already among the top-100 and all set to take giant strides in emulating the path laid down by Gukesh and Arjun. He has the game and the temperament to scale greater heights. Given his focus, he could well bring out something special during the Olympiad. Moreover, the composition of the team is such that four teen-members are sure to feed off each other's energy and enthusiasm. Clearly,Nihal is part of a team that most chess lovers are looking at, with anticipation of some sensational results.

D. Gukesh — The country's youngest Grandmaster is now the youngest in the live ratings of those over 2700. Given his title-winning form this year, Gukesh is going to be one among the key players on whom the India 'B' team will rely in the Olympiad. His uncluttered approach and clarity of thought stands out in the way he carries himself. At 16, with a published rating of 2684 as of July 1, Gukesh promises much more in the coming months. He is obviously keen to make his Olympiad debut count. Much like the new generation talents, Gukesh is not happy with quick draws. He is keen to explore the possibility of a win, irrespective of the colour of his pieces. After finishing second best to Arjun in the National championship and the Delhi International in quick succession, and the heartbreak in Reykjavik (losing the final round from a winning position against Praggnanandhaa, the eventual champion), Gukesh won four tournaments in Spain. One must acknowledge his steely resolve and sense of purpose. Clearly, all the hard work done during the pandemic is now bearing fruit. But he is not the one to sit on his laurels of being the third youngest ever to touch the 2700 mark. He has certainly set sights on 2750 and beyond. Surely, players like Gukesh and some equally talented teammates are promising exciting times of Indian chess.

B. Adhiban — It is hard to believe that at 29, Adhiban finds himself as the oldest man and the lowest-rated player in India 'B'. Nicknamed 'the beast' for his flamboyance and devil-may-care attitude, Adhiban is all set to rediscover himself in the Olympiad. There will be no dearth of motivation as he remains among the handful of Indians who have once touched 2700-mark in rating. His poor form saw him tumble from being 2672 in November last year to 2598 at present. It all started with his poor health and form during the Grand Swiss Tournament. He landed in Kolkata but soon withdrew from the elite Tata Steel rapid and blitz event. Thereafter, the National championship, Reykjavik Open, Sharjah Masters and Lim Kok Ann Invitational proved to be huge disappointments for this performer. Adhiban is too good a player not to get his form back. The Olympiad could well be that stage where Adhiban will reboot and enthral the chess lovers with over-the-board ideas that puts him in a different league from his peers. Make no mistake, in team events,

rating alone does not count for much. Pulling off key games makes the difference. This is where Adhiban can be such a great asset. Once he regains his winning touch and confidence in the initial rounds, one can expect Adhiban to play his part to perfection in the bigger battles ahead.

R. Praggnanandhaa — He is the one making waves like no other. His recent twin-wins over Magnus Carlsen in online events caught the imagination of this cricket-loving nation. Since he was busy playing more online events in the past year and did not play as many classical over-the-board tournaments as some of his teammates, his rating did not see a major surge though he has been gaining points since late last year. Rated at 2648 and having gained a few more from winning the Paracin Open in Serbia, Praggnanandhaa has already become the talking point when many casual chess lovers discuss the sport. Growing in confidence, Praggnanandhaa is set to enjoy his first Olympiad, that too, in the company of teammates of his age-group. His all-round game that helps in changing gears, if required, can be a huge asset in team events where, sometimes, a player has to push the limits in search of a win. The team can expect Praggnanandhaa to step up during the match by pushing his personal goals aside for the sake of the team. With coach R. B. Ramesh around, Praggnanandhaa should find it easier to deal with the challenges. As Ramesh says, "over the years, I have seen on several occasions that I don't have to explain many things to Praggnanandhaa. On his own, he understands what I expect of him." Surely, during the Olympiad, Praggnanandhaa can be expected to be in a great mind-space.

Raunak Sadhwani — Another rising star whose progress often gets clouded by the presence of more famous peers, Raunak has gradually worked his way for a place among the country's awe-inspiring teen brigade. A third 16-year-old in the team, Raunak had a very fruitful 2021 — gaining 47 rating points in 79 days in Europe — but thereafter things did not go as per his liking. On the brighter side, he struck form during the Benasque International Open and tied for first place before being adjudged third, behind champion Aravindh Chithambaram and second-placed Robert Hovhannisyan. Grandmaster from the age of 13 years, 9 months and 26 days, Raunak caught the attention of the chess world when he gained a winning position against Viswanathan Anand in the 2018 Isle of Man tournament but eventually lost. Anand was lavish in the praise of his young rival. Since then, Ranuak has done increasingly well and his climb has been steady. During the Olympiad, Raunak's role could well be to strike on the lower board. Given the team combination that raises visions of plenty of dramatic games, Raunak's presence on the lower board could well be a blessing in disguise for India. Since Raunak's skills in blitz and bullet are well known, these qualities could come handy in crunch situations.

R. B. Ramesh (coach): The country's best known coach, Ramesh preferred to be with this young team and the AICF agreed. Having groomed a number of champions, including Praggnanandhaa and his sister R. Vaishali, Ramesh is set for his biggest challenge. With everyone's attention, including that of Anand, firmly on the progress of Team B, it needed a man of Ramesh's experience to keep the team away from any conversation revolving around the team's medal-winning prospects. Though the team is seeded 11 on average rating of the players, expectations are on the rise with Gukesh and Praggnanandhaa doing well in recent tournaments. Ramesh is happy to deal with the younger lot. This seasoned Grandmaster knows how to keep expectations low and bring out high-level performances.

India 'C'

Surya Shekhar Ganguly is one of the strongest and most experienced players in Indian chess. This will be his seventh Olympiad. He had won the bronze medal at the World Under-10 championship in 1991, before the Indian kids began to sweep the medals at age-group competitions. He won the National premier title for a record six times in a row.

S. P. Sethuraman was part of the team that won the historic bronze medal for India at the 2014 Chess Olympiad. He had lifted the World Under-16 title in 2009. He won the Asian championship in 2016; before him, only four Indians had won it.

Karthikeyn Murali is a two-time World champion in age-group chess. He won the World Under-12 title in 2011 and the Under-16 title in 2013. He is also a two-time National premier champion (2015 and 2016). Outside the country he is perhaps best known for the stunning queen sacrifice he made against the current World No. 3 Alireza Firouza in the 2019 Asian championship, where he was the runner-up.

Abhijeet Gupta won the World junior championship in 2008. Only Viswanathan Anand and Harikrishna had won the prestigious title before him. In 2012, he won an individual silver medal at the Chess Olympiad. He is also a five-time Commonwealth champion.

Abhimanyu Puranik is one of India's strongest young players. His FIDE rating of 2612 proves that. He was the runner-up at the World junior championship in 2018.

Tejas Bakre is the captain of the team.

P. K. Ajith Kumar

Women

India 'A':

K. Humpy: The strongest woman player in India's chess history rightly leads the country's strongest bid for its first Olympiad gold. Playing only her fourth Olympiad since 2004, Humpy holds the key to India's fortunes. Though she has not played a single rated game since February 2020, given her experience and class, Humpy can be expected to add to India's game-points every time she plays. For the first time, India is seeded to win the gold and Humpy spearheads the team that has the resources to justify the top billing. On her return to competitive chess after two years, following the birth of her first daughter Ahana, in 2017, Humpy impressed one and all by winning the 2019 women rapid title. Even during the 2018 Olympiad, she reproduced her magic by scoring five points from six rounds. However, between the eighth and 10th rounds — against Hungary, Italy and Peru — Humpy managed only half a point and did not play the final round. Clearly, this time, Humpy will be looking to cap her run on a brighter note. Rated 2586, Humpy will be the strongest player on view in the women's section. Humpy is still good enough to have a few more cracks at the elusive world title, but for now, she can focus on scripting the country's first medal winning chapter in this Olympiad.

D. Harika — Complementing Humpy's presence on the top board, Harika proves a perfect foil on the second board for India. Very few teams in the world have such performers on the top two boards. Notwithstanding the fact that her first baby is due late in August, Harika has spared no effort in preparing for her ninth Olympiad. "I did not want to miss playing the Olympiad at home and when my doctor assured me that it was fine to play in July and early August, I was so happy. I have done everything within my means to stay healthy, train as hard as I could and left the rest to the wishes of God." These words from Harika reflect what this opportunity — playing the Olympiad before home fans — means to this three-time World championship medallist. She joined other teammates online during the preparatory camps held in Chennai. She has remained in constant touch with not just her teammates and coaches but also with the official costume designer for the Indian contingent. Such has been Harika's involvement. Now much depends on how her body holds up during the event. In any case, Harika's services are likely to be invited only

during the key matches. Given the playing strength of the top-seeded team, Harika will not be required to play in the initial rounds against lower-rated opposition. Everyone in the squad agrees that Harika's mere presence as a team member is very reassuring.

R. Vaishali — The youngest member of the team, at 21, Vaishali is the potent cutting edge the team needed. Groomed under the watchful eyes of coach R. B. Ramesh, Vaishali has the game to pull off key encounters in team events. Unlike most members of the team whose positional play stands out, Vaishali has a more dynamic style. Expect her to be involved in more decisive games than most others against rivals of matching strengths. Playing her first Olympiad, that too, as the third player, is a new challenge for Vaishali. Thankfully, the presence of Ramesh and her younger sibling Praggnanandhaa should help her nerves. In the key encounters, where Humpy and Harika are expected to stay undefeated, India will expect to strike on lower boards, especially the one with white pieces. This is where Vaishali's role could prove very crucial. Though she lacks the experience of her teammates, Vaishali possesses a sound understanding of the positions and manages her time well. Going by her recent form, when she gained her second Grandmaster norm on her way to the eighth Fischer memorial title in Heraklion, Greece, Vaishali should be quite a force as Indian women eye their greatest hour. No wonder then, the coaching staff expects a lot from her.

Tania Sachdev — The most widely seen and heard Indian chess player during the pandemic and beyond, Tania is back for her seventh Olympiad. Being part of the commentary team on the cash-rich Champions Chess Tour and the World championship match, Tania has worked hard to play her part in India's campaign. Irrespective of the fact that Tania is the most followed female chess player from India in the social media space, her understanding of the game makes her worthy of being seen with the best names in the business. During the run-up to the Olympiad, she claimed the women's title in Reykjavik where Praggnanandhaa was the overall champion. Being part of the broadcast team for over two years has surely helped Tania stay in touch with the new ideas in the game like no other in the Indian team. Discussing the game with the best of players and analysts including past masters like Peter Leko and Peter Svidler, has polished Tania's skills, given depth to her positional understanding and also brought fresh insights into the game. In the preparatory camps, Tania has worked hard to prepare for the role she is expected to play in the campaign. An ex-Asian women champion and a former Olympiad medallist, Tania knows it is a huge opportunity to strike gold at home.

Bhakti Kulkarni — An understated warrior in the Indian team, Bhakti, too, is a former Asian women champion. This Olympiad debutant has the game to score when summoned to fill the fourth board. An International Master, Bhakti is articulate and has a more holistic view of the game. As a fierce fighter over the board, she has enjoyed a fair amount of success. After twice missing the National crown in 2016 and 2017, Bhakti finally made it in the following year after a dramatic four-way tie for the top spot. What more, she went on to regain the crown. Coached by Raghunandan Gokhale and mentored by his wife, five-time National champion Anupama Gokhale, Bhakti has goals of performing at the highest level. Her progress appears to have slowed down mainly due to the situation triggered by the pandemic, but Bhakti has it in her to beat the odds. After the pandemic, Bhakti has played only a few tournaments. Though she performed marginally above her rating in the recent Maharashtra Open, Bhakti has the strength to be far more effective in the women-only field. Her never-say-die approach and positive attitude could well be on view in this Olympiad.

Abhijit Kunte (coach): Having guided

the team to the World championship silver medal last October, Abhijit once again earned the right to coach the team. Expertise and guile apart, this Pune-based Grandmaster knows the psychology of the Indian players better and feels strongly about it.

With India being the top-seeded side at home, the pressure on the players is going to be of a different kind. Abhijit has a way of keeping the morale of the team high and that quality could come into play at the business end of the event. Given the composition of the team, Abhijit knows that the team members are not looking up to him for coaching. His role is to ensure all players feel as equals and the spirit within the team remains at an all-time high. Abhijit's management skills should prove adequate in bringing the best out of this team.

India 'B'

Vantika Agrawal — Almost unnoticed, this Delhi-girl has made rapid strides and even won the National online women's title ahead of many seasoned names last July. As part of the gold-winning Online Chess Olympiad team in 2020, Vantika experienced how it felt to be part of the National team. Since then, she has worked very hard to stay in the mix for the Olympiad. With the host getting to field two teams, India 'B' could accommodate many seasoned campaigns with two debutants. Vantika makes her debut as the second highest-rated player in the team. So far, she has managed to find a balance between chess and academics. In fact, during the preparatory camp in Chennai, Vantika was seen juggling between her college books and chess studies. But this bespectacled girl is too focussed on chess and shows the willingness to work hard for success. Having gained from the coaching experience of the country's oldest GM, Pravin Thipsay, who is also the head of the India's Chess Olympiad players' delegation, Vantika looks prepared for the tougher battles ahead. Given her rating, she should be playing almost all the games unless coach Swapnil Dhopade and senior team members have a reason to the contrary.

Padmini Rout — Padmini, the only female player to win an Olympiad gold as a board prize, is raring to go. Being the highest ranked player in the team, she has more responsibility than in any of her previous three outings. She was in Serbia recently for tournaments and looked prepared to take up the challenge. Padmini says her gold-winning performance in 2014 was followed by her worst in 2016 before she made up with a decent 5/7 on the fourth board as a reserve player in 2018. Unlike her previous appearances where she was required to play on the lower boards, Padmini could well be on the top-two boards. This means facing stronger opposition and soaking in more pressure. Her experience should help the team, but Padmini is expected to be a live wire on the board, looking to score at every opportunity. In any case, much will depend on the board-order finalised for the campaign. Will the team management go with the two strongest players at the top or juggle the combination around for greater benefits, remains to be seen. Whatever be the approach, Padmini's role is bound to be very important. Expect her to play aggressively and look for points irrespective of the match-situation.

Mary Ann Gomes — Another seasoned campaigner returning for her fifth Olympiad, Mary is the other board-prize winner in the team. Her vast experience could be handy on the lower boards. Her flexible style of play allows her to go for an all-out attack or simply hold the position for the benefit of the team. Mary is not the one to abandon all caution and go for broke. Her current form does not inspire much confidence but expect her to play at a different level among women players. Her vast experience and comfort level with both colours could be a huge asset to the coach when deciding the board-order for key encounters. As a team player, Mary has managed to

win quite a few key games when they mattered. On the lower boards, the difference in the playing strengths of the two Indian teams is almost negligible, though the rating presents a different picture. Given Mary's experience, it should not come as a surprise if there is steady scoring on boards three and four, especially in the initial rounds.

Soumya Swaminathan — An Indian Oil colleague of Padmini and Mary, former World junior girls' champion Soumya is the other player expected to punch way above her weight. After making her debut in 2012, Soumya will be playing her third Olympiad. She has worked hard during the training camp, under Boris Gelfand, as well as in the second camp, and it remains to be seen how all the training translates into good results. However, like Mary, Soumya's form of the past year is a worry. She struggled in the National championship in February-March and again in the Maharashtra Open in June. Despite the reasons to be low on confidence, Soumya has ways of picking herself up and meeting the challenges head on. It remains to be seen whether the team's think-tank goes by rating in finalising the board-order or prefers Soumya to move a rung down the order. In any case, Soumya could be more effective on the lower boards. Again, the initial rounds could see the players selecting themselves for the crucial battles ahead. This team has the capabilities to soften up quite a few higher seeds and that's what makes this combination an exciting one.

Divya Deshmukh — In March, when this 16-year-old won the National championship ahead of contenders with far more illustrious careers, there was a wave of delight. After a long time, a teenager won the women's National title. Being candid, Divya Deshmukh was quick to acknowledge the guidance provided by Arjun Erigaisi, who, within 24 hours, won the National title in Kanpur. Divya's quality of play during the National championship was exceptional. A consistent performer at age-group competitions at all levels, Divya suddenly emerged as an exciting prospect among the seniors. She gave a good count of herself in the Maharashtra Open where she not only held Azerbaijani GM Azer Murzoev but also stunned International Master Mohammad Nubaishah Shaikh, rated 2433. As a result, Divya's current form could tilt the scales in her favour in the earlier rounds. She brings with her the confidence gained from playing her part well in the 2020 Online Chess Olympiad where India shared the gold with Russia. This experience of playing the Olympiad at home could serve as a huge motivation for a debutant and Divya is no different. Being the lowest-rated and the youngest in the squad, Divya has no pressure of expectations to deal with.

Swapnil Dhopade (coach): This Amravati-based Grandmaster has been with the women's team in the 2019 World team championship. He is back with India 'B' and expects the team to perform above its 12th seeding. He has the team which includes three former and a current National champion. Three experienced players in the company of Vantika and Divya gives Swapnil a few exciting options. Swapnil knows all eyes are on India 'A' teams in both sections but hopes his team catches the eye with a series of good performances. He hopes Padmini to continue her encouraging form while Vantika plays to her rating. The solidity provided by Soumya and Mary alone will not be enough for the team to progress. This experienced duo will have to strike at every opportunity. Divya can step in, as and when any senior player needs a break or is in search of form.

YOUTH POWER

Here are a few **young players** whose performances will be followed closely without being influenced by the results of their teams.

Every Chess Olympiad produces its share of performers. This time, when the mega event makes a return after missing the 2020 edition due to the pandemic, coupled with the absence of defending champions China and traditional front-runners Russia, in both sections, the dynamics no longer remain the same.

The chess world is sure to keep an eye on how Magnus Carlsen shapes the fortunes of Norway or the margin of victory for super hot favourites USA in the Open section.

As a team, on their day, there are a few capable of punching above their weight. Here are a few young players whose performances will be followed closely without being influenced by the results of their teams.

R. Vaishali (2442) and R. Praggnanandhaa (2648) (India)

SHIV KUMAR PUSHPAKAR

Seldom has a sister-brother duo promised to influence their teams' results as much as these siblings from Chennai. Making their Olympiad debut, not too far from their home, Vaishali and Praggnanandhaa are capable of providing the cutting edge in crunch games. In the company of higher-rated teammates, they can absorb the pressure better and perform without letting the occasion get to them. With coach R. B. Ramesh around, expect this duo to provide the sparks.

Nodirbek Abdusattorov (2688) (Uzbekistan)

This 17-year-old made the chess world sit up and watch in disbelief as he clinched the 2021 World rapid title at the expense of Ian Nepomniachtchi and Magnus Carlsen. Even in classical time format, this youngster has made steady strides and eyes a great opportunity to make his nation proud in this Olympiad. Heading the 17th seeded Uzbekistan, Abdusattorov can be expected to be the catalyst for his very inspired teammates to cause a ripple.

AFP

Jan-Krzysztof Duda (2750) (Poland)

Watch out for the exploits of this sensational 24-year-old. Ranked 15th in the world, Duda has a well-rounded game that promises to evolve with time. Having achieved his career-best ranking of 2750, Duda has proved he firmly belongs among the elite. He leads sixth seed Poland that surely has the firepower to break into the medal bracket. How Duda shows the way will be interesting to see.

Vincent Keymer (2686) (Germany)

Here is yet another 17-year-old who has broken into the top-50 of world rankings. Keymer is the spearhead of the ninth seed Germany with all his teammates rated between 2673 and 2642. Much like the Indian quartet of D. Gukesh, Arjun Erigaisi, R. Praggnanandhaa and Nihal Sarin, Keymer holds the promise to create a flutter when pitted against some quality opposition. Many fancied names are already wary of this rising German and this Olympiad provides a fine stage for Keymer to come good.

Zhansaya Abdumalik (2495) (Kazakhstan)

At 21, Zhansaya gets a chance to lead a very bright, young National team in the Olympiad. Ranked 15th in the world, this talented player has won a few world age-group titles, including the world junior girls' crown. She is a trendsetter in her country and an inspiration to budding chess players. Look out for Zhansaya to show the way as Kazakhstan prepares to get noticed on the big stage.

How India got the Chess Olympiad

BHARAT SINGH CHAUHAN

Most Indian Grandmasters come from Tamil Nadu. Plus, historically and culturally, the State is rich and we shall **take immense pride in showcasing it** to our guests from over 180 nations.

Today, as I look back, it appears like a fantasy that India could get the right to host the prestigious Chess Olympiad in a matter of days. It all began in late February when I sent a text message to the FIDE President Arkady Dvorkovich to explore the possibility of India hosting an elite tournament. But how the response from Mr. Dvorkovich led to the Olympiad coming India's way is not only a pleasant surprise but also a distant dream come true.

I remember, I was returning from Kanpur to Delhi by train after finalising the venue for the National championship. A thought ran through my mind that India had hosted many big events and we were now ready to hold something bigger. So, I texted Mr. Dvorkovich that India was keen on hosting any big event for FIDE. The response I received was, "Olympiad?"

I was surprised because till that point I was not aware that the Olympiad was taken away from Russia and FIDE was looking for a new host. I checked and came to know that Moscow was no longer going to be the venue due to Russia's military offensive against Ukraine. I requested Mr. Dvorkovich for time till the following morning to respond. I was so excited that I didn't want to lose the opportunity.

After all, India was aiming to bid for the 2026 edition but with so many European nations to contend with, it could be very difficult to win the bid. So, I said yes.

I made my first call to the Union Sports Minister Anurag Thakur and he, too, gave his approval to the idea. He was quick to remind me of the regulations, the paucity of time and, of course, the ongoing situation involving Russia and Ukraine. I then texted some of my friends from the industry and business houses. I knew the industry was not doing well but before 10 a.m. the following day, I had confirmation from a few sponsors and two governments — Tamil Nadu and Delhi.

The officials of the Tamil Nadu Government suggested that I reach Chennai the same evening so that I could have a brief meeting with the Chief Minister Mr. M. K. Stalin the following morning. Trust me, the honourable Chief Minister did not take time to put his seal of approval. The letter of undertaking from the TN Government was issued to me by 4 p.m. the same day.

Since I had mentioned that our pre-

Timely: "Within 10 days of sending that first text message to the FIDE President Arkady Dvorkovich , India became the host of the 44th Chess Olympiad," says Bharat Singh Chauhan, Secretary of the All India Chess Federation.
B. JOTHI RAMALINGAM

ferred venue was Mahabalipuram because of its seaside location, a team of TN officials accompanied me to check out the hotel facilities at the proposed site. The Mahabalipuram Collector was quick to block a couple of thousand rooms, across various categories, for the players and guests, estimated from over 180 countries. Once we submitted the details of our preparedness to the FIDE, we officially got the hosting rights.

In effect, within 10 days of sending that first text message to Mr. Dvorkovich, India became the host of the 44th Chess Olympiad.

Many people have asked me why Tamil Nadu was preferred over Delhi to play the host. Well, Tamil Nadu is the motherland of Indian chess.

Most Indian Grandmasters come from Tamil Nadu. Plus, historically and culturally, the State is rich and we shall take immense pride in showcasing it to our guests from over 180 nations. I chose Mahabalipuram because I wanted the players to enjoy the beachside locales, something not available in Delhi. It is a long event and the chosen location will have something for everyone.

Working with the TN Government and its officials has been a great experience. In my career, I have not seen a more efficient and positive bureaucracy. They are clear in their thoughts and quick to make decisions. So, whatever we discuss, it gets done with full support of the Government. Being from Delhi and deciding to hold it in Mahabalipuram was a challenge but the pros far outweigh the cons.

Today, I am delighted to have so many reasons to support the decision to have it in this glorious State.

In the past four months, the Organising Committee and its dedicated members have relocated to Mahabalipuram and worked round the clock. The first-ever Chess Olympiad Torch Relay, with stops at 75 cities across the country, has played a significant part in spreading chess and Olympiad to many unexplored areas.

For now, all credit to the Tamil Nadu Government for ensuring that the scale of this edition of Olympiad surpasses anything the chess world has seen in nearly 100 years of this premier team championship.

We, at the AICF headed by Dr. Sanjay Kapoor, are committed to delivering the best Olympiad ever. We wish everyone associated with this Olympiad returns home with memories, and more.

Though I am looking forward to a memorable event, I now understand the magnitude of that text to Mr. Dvorkovich. It has proved to be the first step in bringing the Olympiad to India. May I add, that's the reason why I think it was my best train journey till date.

As told to Rakesh Rao

Countdown begins: The Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M. K. Stalin unveils the hashtag for the Chess Olympiad. From left are V. Meyyanathan, Minister for Youth Welfare and Sports Development, M. Subramanian, Minister for Health and Family Welfare, Bharat Singh Chauhan, secretary, All India Chess Federation and Tournament Director, 44th Chess Olympiad, and Sanjay Kapoor, President, All India Chess Federation. S. R. RAGHUNATHAN

Get, set, move

RAKESH RAO

From finalising the venue to the choice of trophies and medals, **everything is planned meticulously.**

Call a chief guest to a chess event and invariably he spends a few minutes reminding the gathering how India gave this cerebral sport to the world. If the guest of honour happens to be from the judiciary or is a politician, then get ready to hear how they weave chess into their speech and declare how they make each 'move' after due consideration of the possible consequences.

Mercifully, none of this happened when the All India Chess Federation approached the Tamil Nadu Government to consider the possibility of hosting the 44th Chess Olympiad in Mahabalipuram in July-August. A forthright confirmation followed once Chief Minister M. K. Stalin verbally approved the idea.

As a result, within four months, the stage was set for the global event with the participation of 187 countries. Probably, the last 43 editions of the biennial event have not witnessed anything quite like this.

From finalising the venue to the choice of trophies and medals, everything is planned meticulously. Accommodation for players/delegates/guests/volunteers, transportation, Opening and Closing ceremonies and the technical conduct of the event was approved, fine-tuned and responsibilities delegated to the different heads of the task force. Special attention is being paid for promotion. In short, nothing is left to chance.

In the past, Olympiad hosts have gone for an Opening Ceremony lasting around an hour. The quality of accommodation has varied from budget hotels to three-star for most teams. At times, for example in Turin, in 2006, the Winter Olympic Games village was used to provide accommodation to the visiting contingents.

The TN Government and the AICF finalised some notable hotel properties on the East Coast Road for accommodation, closer to the venue of the mega event.

The banquet hall at the venue proved to be clincher but it was also decided to build a second playing hall, at the cost of around Rs. 5-6 crore, in front of the existing hall. If the first hall was approved for being 22,500 square feet in area, the proposed second hall covers around 45,000 square feet. Provisions are in place for an Expo Area, FIDE Pavilion, AICF Pavilion, VVIP lounges, Sponsors' Pavilion, designated areas for publishers of chess literature, ornamental chess-set makers and more.

Given the participation of around 1700 players plus coaches/officials, besides arbiters, special guests, delegates for FIDE Congress, volunteers etc, around 1800 rooms in the nearby five-star hotels and another 650 in four-star properties are blocked. Another 500 rooms, in three-stars and two-star hotels, are reserved for volunteers and invited winners of the age-group chess tournaments held in all the States to mark the Chess Olympiad.

The TN Government has made special boarding and lodging arrangements for members of the police and health departments during the event.

Keeping in mind the tastes of players/officials from over 180 countries, the menu for the entire duration of the event is meticulously planned by hand-picked chefs of some of the finest hotel brands.

No effort is spared to provide timely medical help during the event. Besides the mandatory Covid-19 protocols, plans are in place for ambulances near every hotel, with the doctors and the nurses available 24x7.

Picturesque: Chennai's iconic Napier Bridge has undergone a chess makeover. PTI

Calls can be made to toll-free numbers for assistance of any kind. The service, besides in English, is offered in Spanish, French, Russian, Malay, German and Japanese. Around 415 selected volunteers have been trained to deal with the needs of the visiting teams.

After the traditional welcome at the airport, the guests, on checking into their designated hotels, will be presented a welcome kit and the necessary accreditation card at the hotel. They will also be offered complimentary high-speed internet services and laundry for 3-4 pieces of clothing every day.

The TN Government has made special arrangements at the Chennai Airport for speedy processing of arrival protocols. Dedicated conveyor belts will be used for guests arriving for the Olympiad.

Transportation is a major part of the logistics and the promised arrangements appear very impressive.

Nearly 125 buses from Benz, 100s SUVs and six high-end luxury cars will facilitate the movement of the players/dignitaries during the event. Special air-conditioned waiting areas at the parking lot will be readied for the benefit of the guests.

A dedicated corridor is planned on the highway for the smooth movement of the buses/SUVs that carry the players/officials to and from the venue. The road from Chennai airport to Mahabalipuram is being widened and beautified. Welcome gates/hoardings are also being planned along the way. In fact, Chennai's iconic Napier Bridge has already undergone a chess makeover.

For the two-hour gala Opening Ceremony, Chennai's Jawaharlal Nehru Stadium has been finalised. The TN government's guests include several imminent personalities from the State and the film world with composer A. R. Rehman roped in for a live performance.

Though the Closing Ceremony, too, is proposed at the same venue, the AICF has requested the TN Government to consider holding it on the beach of one of the seaside hotels near the venue. This plea is to make it easier for those guests, due to leave for home, to head straight to the Chennai airport with their baggage, instead of carrying it all the way to the Stadium and then travelling back to board the flight.

Financial bonanza awaits the members of the Indian team following a never-before sponsorship of Rs. 2 crore. The TN Government has footed half the amount with Indorama and State Bank of India contributing Rs. 50 lakh each.

The live broadcast of the games, which is one of the most important components of the event, has been given the attention it deserves. Around 700 digital boards will be used, covering every single game, as part of the live coverage on various platforms. Commentary will be available in at least seven languages, including Tamil. Judit Polgar, Peter Leko and some of the leading commentators will be part of the broadcast team. A deal with *DD Sports* is likely to be signed for the live telecast of the event in the country. Around 200 arbiters, including 80 Indians, will ensure smooth technical conduct of the Olympiad. Cultural activities are planned daily for the benefit of the guests every evening.

Meanwhile, the AICF plans to organise quiz contests for the visiting spectators.

Plans are also afoot to not only present the customary trophies and medals but also give away specially-crafted trophies to the podium-finishers.

Clearly, this scale and magnitude in organising an edition of Chess Olympiad is going to be unprecedented. No wonder, Budapest, the host in 2024, will find it very tough to match the organisational marvel that this edition promises to be.

Best chance to win in both sections

Over the past few editions, in **keeping with the growth of Indian chess,** the performances in the Olympiads have been consistent.

Proud achievement: Some members of the Indian team which won the bronze medal at the Chess Olympiad in Tromso, Norway, in 2014. From left: S. P. Sethuraman, R. B. Ramesh (Coach), Padmini Rout, Parimarjan Negi and M. Lalith Babu. THE HINDU PHOTO LIBRARY

RAKESH RAO

Nearly 100 years after the first 'Chess Olympic Games' were held in Paris to coincide with the eighth Summer Olympic Games in the French capital in 1924, India gets to host the most prestigious team championship in the game.

The Olympiad, held every even-numbered year, returns to Asia 30 years after Manila hosted it in 1992.

Though officially the Chess Olympiad came into being in 1927 when London's Westminster Central Hall saw 70 players from 16 nations participate in a four-board round-robin format, India made its maiden appearance in 1956 in Moscow and finished 27th out of 34 participants.

The team represented by R. B. Sapre, Ramdas Gupta, B. P. Mhaiskar and S. Venkatraman were placed in Group 3 (the more elite teams were placed in stronger groups). The quartet scored seven wins, drew four and lost six from 17 matches. After this ordinary debut, India missed the next edition and played the next three editions to finish 24th (1960), 28th (1962) and 37th (1964). However, from 1966 to 1978, India did not participate due to several reasons.

Since 1980, India has figured in every edition. The best showing came in Tromso (2014) where the team comprising Parimarjan Negi, S. P. Sethuraman, K. Sasikiran, B. Adhiban and M. R. Lalit Babu returned with a bronze medal.

India made its debut in the women's section in 1978, when the eighth edition was played in Buenos Aires, and has figured in every subsequent edition. India came the closest to winning the elusive medal in 2012 (Istanbul) when the team consisting of D. Harika, Eesha Karavade, Tania Sachdev, Mary Ann Gomes and Soumya Swaminathan finished fourth.

India has produced some sterling individual performances, winning 10 medals on various boards in the two categories. Dibyendu Barua (1990) and Padmini Rout (2014) have returned with individual gold medals for their performances.

S. Vijayalakshmi is the only Indian to have returned with two silver medals for her top-board performances in 2000 and 2002.

Over the past few editions, in keeping with the growth of Indian chess, the performances in the Olympiads have been consistent. India has kept itself in the hunt for medals in both sections. However, except in 2014, India has not been able to break into the medal bracket. The home edition in 2022 offers India its best chance to win a medal in both sections.

INDIA AT CHESS OLYMPIAD

Year	Venue	Position in Open Section	Participating Nations	W	D	L	Position in Women Section	Participating Nations	W	D	L
2022	Mahabalipuram		187					161			
2018	Batumi	6	180	7	2	2	8	146	6	4	1
2016	Baku	4	175	7	2	2	5	136	6	4	1
2014	Tromso	3	176	7	3	1	10	136	6	3	2
2012	Istanbul	35	157	3	7	1	4	127	8	1	2
2010	Khanty Mansiysk	18	149	7	1	3	17	115	7	0	4
2008	Dresden	16	146	7	1	3	15	111	6	2	3
2006	Turin	30	148	6	3	4	12	103	7	2	4
2004	Calvia	6	129	10	0	4	9	87	8	3	3
2002	Bled	29	135	7	2	5	19	91	6	3	5
2000	Istanbul	8	126	7	4	3	13	86	6	4	4
1998	Elista	33	110	6	4	3	15	72	7	2	4
1996	Yerevan	59	114	5	2	7	25	74	6	4	4
1994	Moscow	55	124	8	0	6	34	81	8	1	5
1992	Manila	22	102	7	1	6	24	62	7	3	4
1990	Novi Sad	10	108	6	3	5	32	64	5	4	5
1988	Thessaloniki	19	107	7	2	4	14	56	8	2	4
1986	Dubai	25	108	6	4	4	19	49	7	1	6
1984	Thessaloniki	33	88	6	3	5	16	51	8	0	6
1982	Lucerne	41	92	7	0	7	9	45	7	2	5
1980	La Valletta	35	82	6	4	4	25	42	6	3	5
1978	Buenos Aires	Did not enter		66			15	32	5	3	6
1964	Tel Aviv	37	50	3	5	11		Did not enter			
1962	Varna	28	38	6	5	9		Did not enter			
1960	Leipzig	24	40	4	3	13		Did not enter			
1956	Moscow	27	34	7	4	6		Did not enter			

INDIVIDUAL MEDALS

Name	Medal	Category	Board	Score	Year	Venue
Padmini Rout	Gold	Women	Reserve	7½ /8	2014	Tromso
K. Sasikiran	Silver	Open	Third	7½ /10	2014	Tromso
Abhijeet Gupta	Silver	Open	Fourth	7/9	2012	Istanbul
Tania Sachdev	Bronze	Women	Third	9/11	2012	Istanbul
Mary Ann Gomes	Silver	Women	Reserve	6/8	2008	Dresden
Viswanathan Anand	Silver	Open	First	8/11	2004	Calvia
S. Vijayalakshmi	Silver	Women	First	9½ /13	2002	Bled
S. Vijayalakshmi	Silver	Women	First	11/14	2000	Istanbul
Dibyendu Barua	Gold	Open	Second	8½ /11	1990	Novi Sad
Rafiq Khan	Silver	Open	Third	10/13	1980	La Valletta

Total - 10 medals (Gold - 2 ; Silver - 7; Bronze - 1)

Down memory lane

India's gold medallists at the Chess Olympiad, Dibyendu Barua and Padmini Rout, recall their moments of glory at the Chess Olympiad.

A first for India: A young Dibyendu Barua of India (left) and Gata Kamsky of U.S. in action during a Super Grandmaster International chess tournament in New Delhi in 1990. It was a dream year for Barua as his gold medal-winning tally of 8.5 points from 11 undefeated games was instrumental in India finishing a creditable 10th in the Open section of the Chess Olympiad in Novi Sad. This was the country's best finish until 2000 when it occupied the eighth spot.on December 18, 1990. THE HINDU PHOTO LIBRARY

RAKESH RAO

Since winning the country's first individual gold medal from the 1990 Chess Olympiad in Novi Sad, Grandmaster Dibyendu Barua has often pointed out the Government's disregard to the medal and the lack of recognition of the effort. It clearly hurt him to repeatedly explain the importance of the medal, and later plead to officials of the Union and State sports ministries to value the effort.

Today, even 32 years after his gold-winning effort, the tinge of sadness remains embedded in his heart. "If chess is not an Olympic sport, is it the fault of the players? Why can't the Government recognise the medal-winning performances in the Chess Olympiad? With participation from over 180 countries, one can imagine the challenge that lies in winning a medal."

Barua's tally of 8.5 points from 11 undefeated games was instrumental in India finishing a creditable 10th in the Open section. This was the country's best finish until 2000 when it occupied the eighth spot.

Those days, India was not the force that it is today in world chess. Anand was the only Grandmaster and Barua was looking for his second GM-norm, which incidentally came his way following his epoch-making performance.

Barua won six matches and drew five to walk away with the individual gold medal on the second board. Anand faced the heat on the top board and ended with five wins, five draws and two losses. Those days the Olympiad was played over 14 rounds, unlike

the present day's 11.

Recalling his best performance in seven Olympiad appearances, Barua places his victory over England's Michael Adams (in the sixth round) as his best.

"I think he was foxed by my unorthodox opening lines and later could not get away from a checkmating net. Adams was rated 100 points higher and was an obvious favourite. As a result, beating him (in 64 moves) made me very happy," says Barua, rated 2490 at that time.

Though Barua won and Anand drew, England won the match at the expense of D. V. Prasad and Sudhakar Babu on the lower boards.

"Two other good wins came against Iceland's Mergeir Petursson and Sweden's Ferdinand Hellers, both white pieces. These players were rated 2500+ and these boosted my confidence."

Barua recalls how he almost did not play the final round against Czechoslovakia. "Initially, I thought, by not playing I was anyway winning the gold. But before the match, I think the U.S. captain approached our team captain and requested that Anand and I play the final round since an Indian victory improved their medal prospects. I don't really remember what exactly was the scenario then. But I played and drew against Jan Smejkal (rated 2545) after 44 moves."

With the 44th Olympiad round the corner and India ready to host its first, Barua says, "I have always loved playing the Olympiads. Even now, I feel like being part of the team."

Barua's boyish and mischievous smile at this point aptly reflects the emotions behind the words.

It took another 24 years before the Indian chess fraternity could celebrate another individual gold.

Padmini Rout, chosen as a reserve, belted out seven wins and walked away with the gold with a stupendous performance of 7.5 points from eight rounds in the 41st Olympiad in Tromso, Norway in 2014.

"That was my best performance," gushes Padmini as she states the obvious. "I

Getting ready: Union Law Minister Kiren Rijiju hands over the torch to Indian chess Grandmaster Dibyendu Barua at the torch relay for the 44th Chess Olympiad, at Red Fort in New Delhi. GM Viswanathan Anand and FIDE President Arkady Dvorkovich are also seen. PTI

Stupendous show: Padmini Rout, chosen as a reserve, belted out seven wins and walked away with the gold with a stupendous performance of 7.5 points from eight rounds in the 41st Olympiad in Tromso, Norway, in 2014. PTI

remember, I was getting good positions every time and the results were to my liking."

Rated 2318, Padmini faced all lower-rated rivals and stamped her authority by taking her time. For the record, she won five games with white pieces and two with black.

It must be remembered that Padmini's individual effort was somewhat pushed into the background as the Indian men returned with a bronze medal — first for the country from the Chess Olympiad!

In the eight matches that Padmini figured in, India won five, drew two and lost only to Serbia.

Though her first-round win over lowly-rated New Zealand's Nicole Tsoi came in just 28 moves, Padmini had to produce her best in 80 moves to down Kazakhstan's Madina Davetsbaeva, rated 2289. This also proved to be the toughest rival Padmini faced in her campaign.

"This was a tough game where I had to find a way to stop her two connected passed pawns with my knight and promote my lone pawn with the help of my king," remembers the former National champion.

Padmini's next four victories were spread around 50 moves and put her firmly on course for a medal.

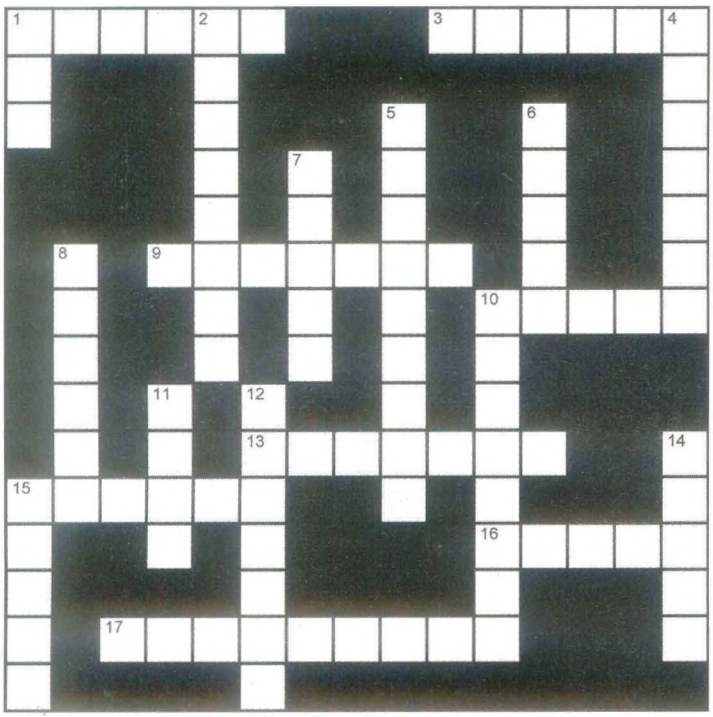
The fifth-round victory over Austria's Elisabeth Hapala came in 55 moves, five moves fewer than Padmini needed to beat Spain's Yudania Hernandez Estevez with black pieces in the sixth round.

Again, playing with white pieces against the Netherlands' International Master Tea Lanchava, Padmini emerged victorious in 53 moves in the seventh round. Next, Padmini sat behind the black pieces against Indonesia's Ummi Fisabilillah and won in 50 moves.

"It was a good run and that brought a lot of joy to the team," remembers Padmini.

It was the 10th round victory, in 40 moves, over Swiss girl Laura Stoeri that ensured the gold, provided Padmini did not lose the next round. Wisely, Padmini stayed away and claimed the gold.

"Yes. I took a drop in the final round (against Romania) which we drew 2-2 for the 10th place. I was happy to contribute to the team's cause. But winning the gold remains a very special moment in my life," concludes the nation's only gold medallist in the women's section.



SOLUTION TO LAST FORTNIGHT'S CROSSWORD

CHESS OLYMPIAD SPECIAL

ACROSS

1 The veshti-clad 'Knight.' (6)

3 Russian-born Alekhine represented this country in multiple Olympiads. (6)

9 Batumi, the city that hosted the last Olympiad before the pandemic, is in this country. (7)

10 It tied with Russia for gold in the 2020 edition. (5)

13 Before playing for Russia, Sergey Karjakin represented this country in Olympiads. (7)

15 The first official Olympiad was held here in 1927. (6)

16 The Olympiad was held in this Israeli city in 1976. (5)

17 The venue of the Olympiad in 1950 after the long 11-year break caused by the war. (9)

DOWN

1 Representing Soviet Union, this 'Magician from Riga' earned seven individual medals between 1958 and 1982. (3)

2 The 2024 Chess Olympiad is scheduled to be held here. (8)

4 A bronze medal in 1939, its only till date, was achieved with Paul Keres amid its ranks. (7)

5 India's first player to play 100 games in Chess Olympiad. (9)

6 The Dutch town where the first women's Olympiad was held in 1957. (5)

7 City where the first unofficial Chess Olympiad took place, coinciding with the 1924 Summer Olympics. (5)

8 The Norwegian city where India had its first podium finish. (6)

10 He led the attack for Ukraine as it won the gold for the first time in 2004. (8)

11 This body was formed on the closing day of the first unofficial Chess Olympiad. (1,1,1,1)

12 The winner of the first official Olympiad. (7)

14 Robert ..., the Zimbabwean player who, in the 2002 Olympiad, won all nine of his games, emulating Alekhine's record. (5)

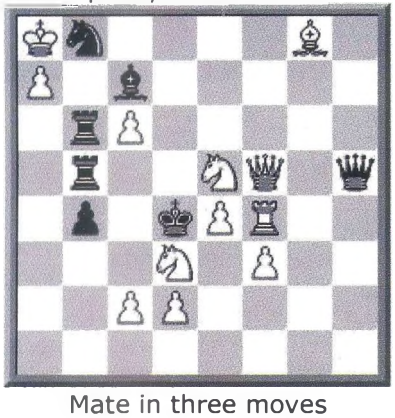
15 The Against Chess Olympiad protest tournament was held in this north African city in 1976. (5)

Friedrich Chlubna: Austrian maestro

By C.G.S.Narayanan

Friedrich Chlubna (1946-2005), was a well known Austrian composer, an assiduous columnist, a distinguished judge and a prolific writer who has authored many noted works on chess composition. His output is around 600 problems in various genres. He was awarded FIDE IM title in 1979.In 1980 he started editing the problem pages of Austrian magazine 'Schach Aktiv.'Sunken treasures' and ' The Mate of the white king' are two among many popular books he authored.I present here three problems of this celebrated composer.

Friedrich Chlubna
I prize, Schach 1971



Mate in three moves

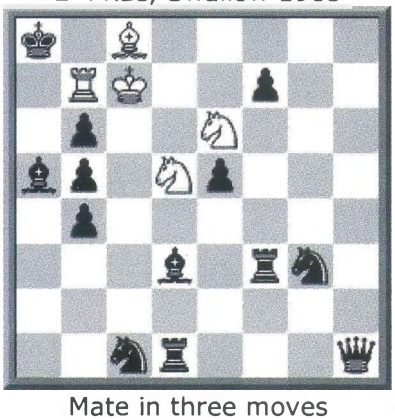
The key **1.Qf8!** threatens 2.Qxb4+ Rxb4 3.c3 mate.1...Rxe5 2.Qc5+ Rxc5 e5;1...Bxe5 2.Qd6+ Bxd6 3.e5;1...Qxe5 2.Qg8 (3.Qg1) Qxg8 3.e5.The WQ sacrifices on 3 squares to effect the battery mate.

In the second problem below WK has to just vacate c7 for both knights to mate on the square.Tries auch as 1.Kd7? and 1.Kc6? are parried by 1..Re6 2.Nd7;1...Ne6 2.Nd3

zagoruyko with changed mates for Re6 and Ne6 throughout.

double pinning moves 1....Bf5 and 1...Rf6 respectively.

Friedrich Chlubna
2 Prize, Swallow 1965

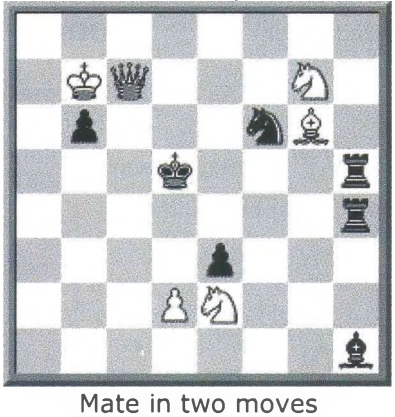


Mate in three moves

The key 1.Kd6! provokes two checks from the BNg3 which effectively remove these strong defences.1...Ne4+ 2.Kd7 3.Nc7
1...Nf5+ 2.Kc6 3.Nc7

The two-mover for solving features pseudo cyclic le Grand artistically set.

Friedrich Chlubna
4 Pr, Schach report 1987



Mate in two moves

Solution to problem for solving in the article 'Tribute to French wizard': Set 1..Re6 2.Rg5;1..Ne6 2.Qd6 Try 1.Rd6?(2.Qd4)Ne6 2.Rd5;1...Ne2 2.Qc5 but Nd5! Try 1.Nd6? (2.Qe4) 1..Re6 2.Nf7;1..Ne6 2.Ndc4 but Nxg6! **Key 1.Ne5!**(2.Qe4)

Readers may send in their queries to cgsnarayanan@hotmail.com

Black correction three-movers

By C.G.S.Narayanan

In Black Correction, a random move of a black piece, a primary defence, carries a harmful effect, called 'primary error' which White can utilize to mate with a secondary threat. However, the same black piece can play so as to compensate the primary error and prevent the secondary threat, but this correction move has a new secondary error which again White can utilize.The three three-movers in this article exhibit correction play by black,the first two intensively, combining with model mates and pin models.

Matousek Frantisek
I Pr, casopis ceskych Sachistu 1915

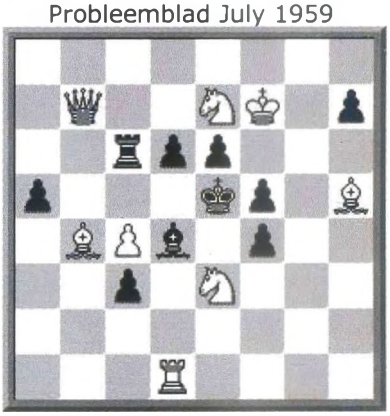
Mate in three moves

In the above problem the **Key 1.Rf6!** is a waiter.The king flight 1..Kxe5 is met by 2.Qb6 Kf4 3.Qd4 A model pin mate (2..Kd5 3.Rxf5).Now the correction play by BNf5.The random 1...Nxh4 2.Nb4+ Kxe5 3.Qa1 (model mate) The corrrection 1...Nd4! is met by 2.Nc4! 2...N×b5 3.Nb4# 2...Kc5 3.□ f5# (again a model pin mate).Another correction is 1...Ne3 2.Nd7 Kd4 3.Rd6 (another pin model)

The second diagram there are two pieces-BRc6 and BBd4 which are involved in correction play.

The key 1.Ng2! threatens 2.Nxc6 Ke4 3.Rxd4 and the purpose of the key is to guard e3.The BBd4 random permits 2.Bxc3+ Bd4 3.Re1 (2..Ke4 3.Qa1).The correction 1...Bb6 avoids Qa1 but curtails BR. Now 2.Bf3 (3.Nxc6) Rc8/Rxc4 3.Bxd6 (2...Rc5 3.Bxc3).R random (say 1...Rc5) 2.Re1+ Be3 3.Bxc3 and correction is 1...Rxc4 2.Qf3 (3.Qxf4).

C.J.R.Sammelius
I Pr, Fredrik W.Nanning MT 58-59
Probleemblad July 1959



Mate in three moves

In the probem given below for solving watchout for the correction play by BNd7, the only mobile black piece on the board

Yuri Orbatenko
I Pr, Problemist Prybuzhya 1993

Mate in three moves

Solution to problem for solving in the article 'Friedrich Chlubna; Austrian Maestro': Key 1.e4! (threat 2. Qc6) 1...Rxd4 2.Nc3

Readers may send in their queries to cgsnarayanan@hotmail.com

India's advantage is that it can fire on all four boards. And that means that even if things are tough in one, we can rescue ourselves in another.

Exuberance, experience guide India

VISWANATHAN ANAND

The third day of the Chess Olympiad in Mahabalipuram was a crazy day! There were moments when you didn't know what was happening, especially in the game of the young R. Praggnanandhaa. I was very worried at some point as Pragg had chosen a sharp combative opening, which then naturally leads to a complicated position. His opponent Yannick Pelletier from Switzerland played very well. And the other boards, too, weren't immediately obvious that it was going to go well for India. But, in the end, we won three out of the remaining four boards. So that took a lot of pressure off India. Raunak Sadhwani broke through at some point and Pragg did well to fight back and was lucky to win on time. It was a day filled with a lot of drama.

Even for India 1 — for a long time — it was a tough struggle. But in the end, after the time scramble, Arjun Erigaisi found some key moves, and everything worked out.

For India 3, on the fourth board, Surya Sekhar Ganguly looked to be in a very unpleasant position. But he used his experience to play out a draw and all the remaining boards, too, collected the points.

In the women's section, India 1 was going quite slowly. But finally, we won on Bhakti Kulkarni's board. At the beginning of the game, Bhakti looked utterly lost and was in big trouble. I was concerned because it meant that we had to win two of the remaining three games. But in the end, she did well to recover and post a win. Despite the drawn games of Tania Sachdev and D. Harika, that match came our way.

Varshini had a tragic loss playing for India 3. She played a brilliant game and all she had to do was to capture (on the e5 square) at some point and it was breaking through. Instead, she found a complicated line, and got into trouble. When I was seeing this turn of events, I was perturbed. But, as always, on two of the other boards, Pratyusha Bodda and P.V. Nandhidhaa won. So, that match was in the bag, as well.

India's advantage is that we can fire on all four boards. And that means that even if

things are tough in one, we can rescue ourselves in another.

Earlier, on day two, I was relieved that we pulled through everywhere. R. Vaishali missed a win at some point and could have done better.

Raunak Sadhwani delivered a checkmate, offering a nice gift to the chess fans of the country. Everywhere our lead was large enough to accommodate problems. There was good pressure by K. Sasikiran in the game against Iulian Baltag of Moldova as India secured a comfortable 3.5-0.5 win. Every point scored is wonderful when all the top teams are winning.

For Norway — on day three — it looked like Magnus (Carlsen) might do one of his usual things but in the end, experienced Daniel Vocaturo held on to a fighting draw. Italy literally broke through on the two lower boards through Lorenzo Lodici and Francesco Sonis. But I wouldn't call it a big upset as Italy won this match quite comfortably.

Under scrutiny: World chess champion Magnus Carlsen looks on as players of India 2 are locked in an intense battle with Switzerland during Round 2 of the Chess Olympiad.
B. VELANKANNI RAJ

Colourful: Artistes perform during the Opening Ceremony of the 44th Chess Olympiad at the Jawaharlal Nehru Stadium in Chennai. RAKESH RAO

A celebration of chess

RAKESH RAO

Appreciation poured in not only from those in the stands but also those who watched it in the digital space.

For a non-Olympic sport like chess, the Olympiad is the most sought-after event. In keeping with its ever-elevating status the number of participating nations has reached a record 187 and the Opening Ceremony of the 44th edition of the Chess Olympiad in Chennai's Jawaharlal Nehru Stadium was truly path-breaking.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M. K. Stalin and several celebrities, including actor Rajnikanth were present during the event which was conceptualised by film director Vignesh Shivan. A few segments of the evening were simply mind-blowing and the show brought to the fore the rich Tamil culture and heritage, with choreography by Shaimak Davar and the voice of actor Kamal Haasan. The 3-D mapping was truly world-class.

Posts on social media have indicated that the impact of the extravaganza was felt beyond the chess world. Never before in the previous 43 editions of the Olympiad, had the Opening Ceremony seen such splendour. Appreciation poured in not only from those in the stands but also those who watched it in the digital space.

Special themes

With more than 700 approved items on the menus of hotels hosting chess players, officials and delegates, each property is trying to highlight the theme of the chequered board, king, queen and knights. At the venue of the event, the chefs have left no stone unturned to play up the chess connection. More often than not, the desserts on offer sport the chess look...

Randa Seder — the most sought-after...

Meet Randa Seder, the eight-year-old

Sweet touch: The chefs at the hotels where the players and officials are accommodated, have left no stone unturned to play up the chess connection. More often than not, the desserts on offer sport the chess look. RAKESH RAO

girl from Palestine. Be it a chess-loving spectator, a fellow-participant or the Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M. K. Stalin, Randa's magic has spared none. Runner-up in her National championship, Randa making it to the Olympiad is indeed very special. Though several countries have players younger than Randa, none have made it to their National team for this premier competition. Palestine is making its debut in the women's Olympiad and Randa is chaperoned by her senior teammates. With the attention Randa continues to get in the chess world, her teammates feel that this could help the sport grow in the war-torn Palestine.

Moral policing

Arguably, chess is among the very few sporting disciplines which can be termed as gender-neutral. Female players may compete with men in the 'Open', besides having a separate women's section. But when it comes to the *Bermuda Party* — the most awaited fun-event during the Olympiads, the guidelines for dress-code for women has raised many eyebrows.

It reads...

3.d. *The following is NOT acceptable for women players.*

Beach-wear slips, profanity and nude or semi-nude pictures printed on shirts, torn pants or jeans, holes, noticeable unclean clothing, sun glasses, sport caps. Revealing attire, clothes such as denim shorts, short-shorts, cut-off shorts, gym shorts, crop tops, tank tops and clothes made of see-through materials or clothes that expose areas of the body usually covered in the location where the event is taking place.

As though to make amends, the organisers have made it a ticketed event for the "Kings" and FREE for the "Queens."

Any justification?

'The Indian teams have great potential'

Chess great Boris Gelfand was happy to share his wisdom with the Indian players gearing up for the Chess Olympiad in Chennai. The 54-year-old believes India is a serious medal contender in both sections of the Olympiad.

Clash of the titans: Boris Gelfand contemplates his next move against Viswanathan Anand during the FIDE World Chess Championship match in Moscow, in May, 2012. Gelfand lost. "A few years before that match, I was one of the best players of all but not all best players in the world succeeded. I managed to get to a point. I would say that was a matter of destiny," he says as he reflects on that defeat. AP

RAKESH RAO

Boris Gelfand comes across as a genial genius. Soft spoken and extremely warm in his ways, he is a favourite of the Indian players, young and not-so-young alike. When not playing competitively, Gelfand loves to spend time travelling to share his vast knowledge and hone budding players.

Not so long ago, he was best remembered in India for finishing second-best to Viswanathan Anand in the 2012 World Championship match in Moscow. But in recent years, he has worked closely with the teen talent of India that is so delightfully threatening to rule the roost sooner than later.

Thanks to the initiative taken by *Microsense*, a noted network systems integration company, Gelfand, along with Vladimir Kramnik, has had a closer look at the creamy layer of India's budding chess talent.

A former World No. 3, Gelfand remained among the top 30 players for 27 years since 1990. He played for the Soviet Union and Belarus before representing Israel in 1999. The 54-year-old was in Chennai where the Indian teams for the Chess Olympiad were training. For over 10 days, Gelfand spent time with the players who could not have enough of him.

For one long session, Anand joined Gelfand and the two kept the group under their spell.

In Chennai on the invitation of the All India Chess Federation, Gelfand took time off to speak to *Sportstar* and maintained that India was a serious medal contender in both sections of the Chess Olympiad.

Boris, curious to know from you, do these players really need someone to "coach" them? Somehow the term does not sound appropriate considering the level at which most of them are currently playing.

You are right. Coach is not the correct term.

Call me a consultant or a mentor because they are all great players. Actually, in the past, during the different projects, I helped the Indian junior players. I've been in Chennai here for the *Microsense*-organised camp. Then online coaching for the *Westbridge Anand Chess Academy* through Anand. So I'm familiar with younger players and have less experience with more experienced members of the team.

How do you deal with different styles of the players in any camp of this kind?
All chess players have their own style, their strong and weak points. My goal is to help each member of the national team to eliminate or minimise weak points and try to help how to channel a game in a direction where he is ahead and where his strong points are more vivid.

In general, how was it working with this group?
It was great to work for about six days with the women's team and then with the men. We all were together in it. So, we chatted, communicated and solved on-board problems. Even on days when I was sharing my experience with the women's team, I also spent some time with members of the men's team.

As a group, I think they are all very hard working, very motivated and focussed. I'm very glad to see [Koneru] Humpy get back to chess after some years. She is really in good form and is really sharp. Also, some other members of the team are very motivated. It's the first home Olympiad and that, too, after the pandemic. Therefore, they are eager to show themselves and it's a very good sign.

How do you plan your schedule for such a short duration camp?
You know, the time was not that much and I wanted to share something in the camp. But, of course, I have to listen. What's more urgent for some? Where do they struggle the most? What is that a player feels less confident about and what could I do to boost it?

I spoke to them about the mistakes I made. All of us are human, all of us make mistakes, all of us will have our moments of weakness, lack confidence and worry about how we get better. So, I think, by doing this, I may help. Each of us thinks: 'I'm the only one who has this kind of trouble'. In fact, for everyone, everybody, even the strongest players go through such moments.

Dream team: Boris Gelfand with Vladimir Kramnik (left) at the official inauguration of a coaching camp in Chennai, in January, 2020. In recent years, Gelfand and Kramnik have had a close look at India's budding stars. M. KARUNAKARAN

How was it to have Anand around for a session?
It was nice that Anand found time to do it and I learned a lot. He made some points. Maybe, I have my style, I see it my way and he sees it another way. This way, when they (the players) see different approaches, they can pick up the best from each of us and make another push. You know, he is doing a lot. He is sharing his experience with juniors and it's really fantastic.

Any takeaway for you from what Anand said?
Anand made a point that the process of gaining confidence is different from tournament to tournament. In some tournaments, he is winning all better positions but none in some others. For me, it is not like this. For me, I have moments that are up and down. When Anand has his confidence and is doing well, he is unbeatable. I was looking through the games, what he explained, and then I realised how it works.

The weight of expectations: Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi (left) with Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M. K. Stalin (centre) and Viswanathan Anand at the inaugural ceremony of the 44th Chess Olympiad. Gelfand knows there will be pressure on Indian players to do well. "I hope they will take it in a positive way rather than be stressful," he says. AFP

Talking of Anand, how do you remember your 2012 World Championship clash in Moscow?

It's kind of interesting, because almost exactly after 10 years we played our World Championship match in Moscow, we met in Chennai.

Playing Anand was a unique experience and I'm proud I managed to get to this match. I prepared well to be equal to such a great opponent. A few years before that match, I was one of the best players of all but not all best players in the world succeeded. I managed to get to a point. I would say that was a matter of destiny.

It was a total equal match. Both sides had their chances. I missed some chances. He missed some chances. But it was a balanced match. Even in the (rapid) tiebreaker, I believe I played better that day. But he took his chances while I failed.

How would you reflect on your chess career at present?

I'm happy. I would be happy to play a bit more but for a year and a half, there was pandemic. From July to December last year, I played really intensively. I played eight tournaments. Now I don't have that many invitations. Hopefully, something will come up. I will play more but also, at the same time, I'll do some kind of mentoring.

I'm helping young players in different countries — a lot in India — improve and I'm happy to do it. Since that World Championship match, I have written four books. In all, I'm happy to play and share my knowledge as much as possible.

How do you assess the Indian teams for the Olympiad?

The Indian teams have great potential. I think people could underestimate India's team B. They have the potential to be, at least, among the top 10... maybe even better. If some of the players are in form, it can go far. It is really a unique generation. They also have a more experienced B. Adhiban in the team. It will also help.

So I think the teams have a chance to fight for medals. I just hope they will be inspired by the local conditions and not be under pressure. There will be extra pressure because India is a big country and everyone is waiting (for India to do well). I hope they will take it in a positive way rather than be stressful. I just hope playing at home ground would help them... home food, climate etc. Also, objectively, for some teams coming from abroad could take some time to get adjusted. So India has the home advantage.

Defences on a square

By C.G.S.Narayanan

In the three-move chess problems black's first move defences on a single square and the varied errors committed by them exploited by white make them artistic pieces of composition.The intensity with which these defences are crafted on a single square depend on the number of pieces coming on to this square.This article presents three problems in which at least three black men, on their first move, capture white piece or pawn on a single square.

Marandyuk Mikhail
I prize,Die Schwalbe 1997

Mate in three moves

In the first example above by Ukranian master, the key **1.Qd6!** threatens 2.Rf6+ Qxf6 3.Qxf6.The WPe5 is captured by four black men so that the extra guard on f6 needed in the threat is removed. 1....Bxe5 2.Bg3+ Bxg3 3.Bg4;1....Rxe5 2.Ne3+ Rxe3 3.Rg5.In these two variations he black defences almost return to their original squares opening guards for e4 and f4.In the other two variations the third move mates return as second move continuations forcing pin mates on the third move. 1...Nxe5 2.Bg4+ (Nxg4 3.hxg4) Ke4 3.Qb4 (pin mate)1...Qxg4 2.Rg5+ Kf4
3.Rf6 (again a pin mate).

It require three to show any cyclic theme and the expert Lacny weaves a cyclic block with a lovely quiet threat that follows sacrificial **key 1.Bb5!** 2.Ne4 3.Nd6

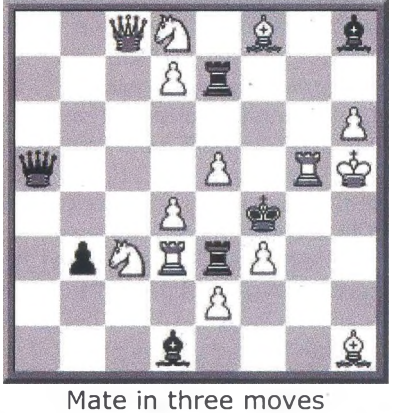
Ludovit Lacny
I prize,Slovensky mag 1943

Mate in three moves

Follow the three captures 1....Nxc3 2.Nc6 3.Ne5;1...Rxc3 2.Rc6 3.Rf6 1....Bxc3 2.Bc6 3.Bxd5.The beauty of this masterpiece is that identical white pieces move on to another single square c6. The byplay 1...axb5 2.Nxb5 3.Nd6.

In the problem for solving below the motif of black defence and that of the second move of white are similar.

C.G.S.Narayanan
8th-9th place 10WCCT 2017



Mate in three moves

Solution to problem for solving in the article 'Black correction play': Key move **1.Rb5! waiting** 1...f3 2.Nb6;1...B any 2.Nc7;1...Bc6 2.Qa1

Readers may send in their queries to cgsnarayanan@hotmail.com

Keen observers: Viswanathan Anand watches the proceedings of the 44th Chess Olympiad along with the Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu M. K. Stalin.
PTI

VISWANATHAN ANAND

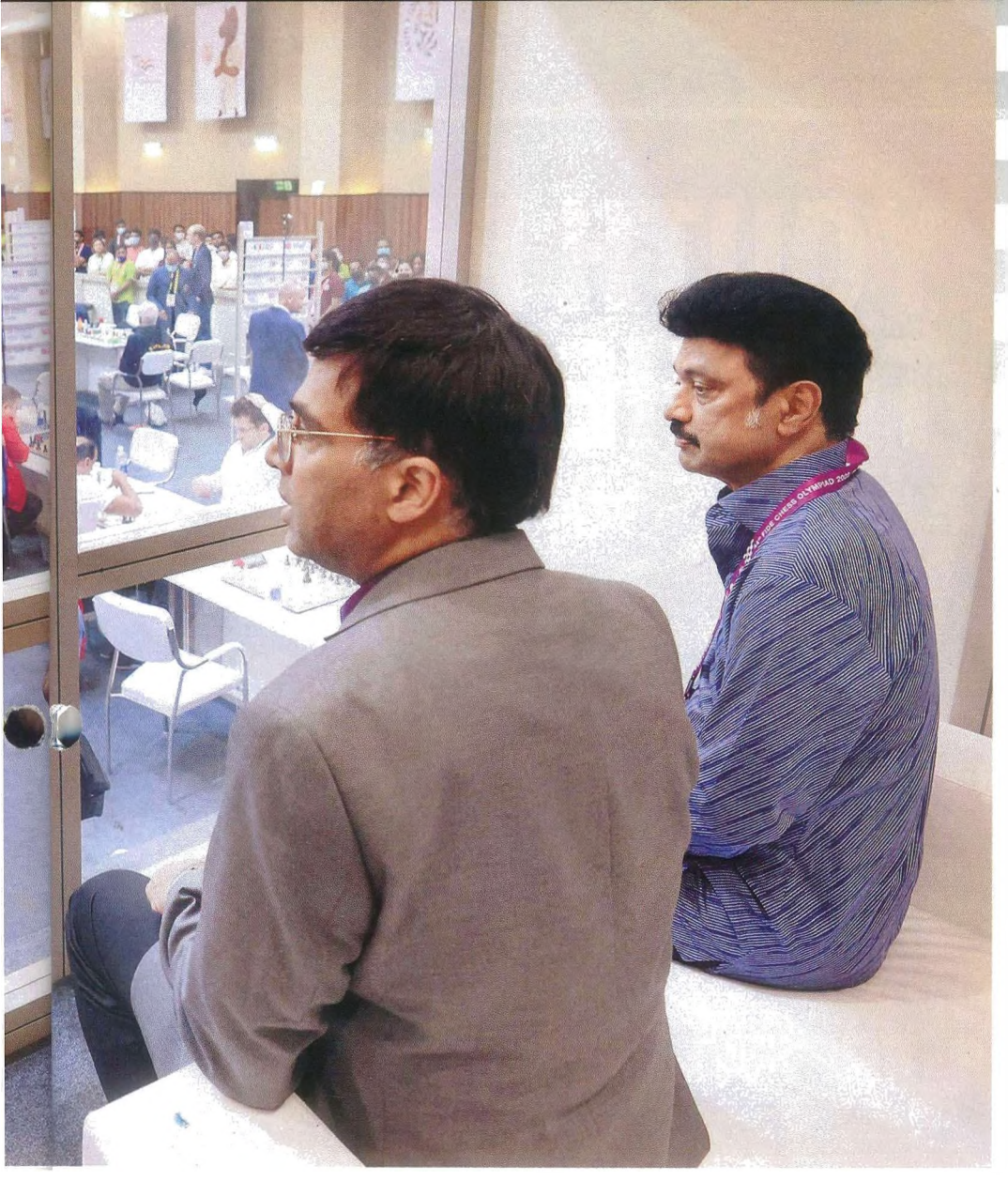
Indians make their moves count

Viswanathan Anand looks back at India's performances at the 44th FIDE Chess Olympiad in Chennai.

After all the drama of India 2 on the penultimate day, I was hoping that at least the women, which had come through relatively unscathed till the end and was leading, would have a good day. But, the team had a horrendous final match and had no ways to repair the damage.

Koneru Humpy had a very imaginative sacrifice but unfortunately, it seems that the precision required after that was quite high. Tania Sachdev's opening just didn't work out. On top of that, Bhakti Kulkarni played a plan which turned out quite flawed. And so, very soon, we were in very, very big trouble. Once Ukraine dispatched Poland in style, the championship left our hands. A first bronze from the women's section is still very special for Indian chess.

I really commend R.B. Ramesh and all the players in India 2 to pull themselves together. In fact, I had the chance to meet many of them on the August 8 evening, and they had kind of taken it on the chin and were getting ready to play a game. They



deserved the gold but to take the bronze with a commanding last-round victory is commendable.

As for India men's 1, I would like to single out Arjun Erigaisi's performance. He played all 11 rounds and his score improved dramatically in the last few rounds with a couple of wins. I think no one will dispute that D. Gukesh had the performance of the Olympiad. Eight points from eight rounds is a world record and his gold medal on Board 1 is really a colossal achievement. This was a high-scoring Olympiad where the top boards were scoring heavily. R. Vaishali's bronze on Board 3, Tania's bronze on Board 4, and Divya Deshmukh's bronze as a reserve are all decent performances. As I have said before, Tania was the lynchpin of the Indian team's performance while Humpy and D. Harika were steady, holding down the top two boards. Tania was scoring very often and Bhakti also contributed some crucial wins and it's very sad that they both lost on the final day.

I'm just so proud of Nihal Sarin as well, for his gold on Board 2. And I think at least these individual golds make up a little bit for the team's disappointment. As I have said before, Arjun also had a phenomenal performance even if he didn't win a team medal. I think it takes nothing away.

By the way, Arjun and Gukesh both crossed 2700 in live ratings. It's amazing that every one of our guys won something, because Arjun won silver and R. Praggnanandhaa a bronze, and that's just so cool. Honestly, hearing all this makes me feel much better.

If India 2, with a starting rank of 11, took the bronze, gold and silver went to a young Uzbekistan and an experienced Armenia, seeded 14 and 12 respectively.

YOUTH POWER TO THE FORE

RAKESH RAO

The opportunity to host the biennial Chess Olympiad fell into India's lap late in February and the World Chess Federation (FIDE) announced its decision in March, and it was only natural that the chess aficionados in the country hoped to see a great show from the home-grown talents.

A medal in both sections appeared a distinct possibility considering the current playing strengths of India's players and the absence of chess superpowers Russia and China.

When India 2 did land a medal in the Open section, it brought with it a feeling of consolation. Indeed, after the disappointment of missing the gold that seemed in India's grasp midway through the penultimate round against Uzbekistan, the eventual bronze did not bring the joy that it did in 2014.

The initial look on the faces of the bronze medal winners made way for smiles with the confirmation of the individual medals. Teen-stars D. Gukesh and Nihal Sarin (gold medals), Arjun Erigaisi (silver) and R. Praggnanandhaa (bronze) stood duly rewarded for their consistent performances.

In fact, during the course of the Olympiad, Gukesh and Arjun crossed the coveted 2700 in live ratings to become India No. 2 and 5, respectively.

Interestingly, none of the top-10 teams made it to the podium. Overwhelming fa-

Proud moment: The top-three medal winning teams, Uzbekistan, Armenia and India 2 with the Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M. K. Stalin, FIDE President Arkady Dvorkovich, FIDE Deputy President and former world chess champion Viswanathan Anand, AICF President Sanjay Kapoor and AICF Secretary Bharat Singh Chauhan. PTI

vourite USA never challenged for the gold, though it came close to challenging for a bronze on the final day. With India 1 and USA involved in a 2-2 draw in the final round, the path stood cleared for India 2 to be on the podium.

If India 2, with a starting rank of 11, took the bronze, gold and silver went to a young Uzbekistan and an experienced Armenia, seeded 14 and 12 respectively.

Uzbekistan, like India 2, had a young team. If Adhiban, 29, was the oldest member in India 2, Johangir Vakhidov, 27, was the opposite number for Uzbekistan. Other members of the team were: World rapid champion Nodirbek Abdusattorov (17), Nodirbek Yakubboev (20), Sindarov Javokhir (16) and Shamsiddin Vokhidov (20). In fact, when Uzbekistan made its Olympiad debut in 1992 and took the silver, no member of this gold medal-winning team was even born!

With eight wins and three draws, Uzbekistan was the worthy champion. Armenia (9 wins, a draw and a loss) played without Levon Aronian who turned out for the USA, but its determined show was worthy of the silver medal. India 2 (8 wins, two draws and a loss) didn't really have a reason to complain since it lost to Armenia and drew with Uzbekistan.

The much-awaited face-off involving India 1 and India 2 never took place. A fourth-place for India 1, ahead of USA, deserved more attention but the performance was pushed into the background since India

2 did better. The below-par performances of USA and Magnus Carlsen-led Norway contributed to the title-race taking an unpredictable course. USA, whose lowest-rated player at 2720 was equal to P. Harikrishna, India's highest in the fray, appeared the most demotivated side. Though it did enough to win most games, it never played to its reputation.

The fact that India 1 and USA — seeded two and one — had an identical record of seven wins, three draws and a loss that was matched by 48th seed Moldova reflects the degree of uncertainty in a format of this nature.

Again, Moldova's strong finish underlined the importance of doing well in the last three rounds of a Swiss league. Moldova, 30th after the eighth round, scored over 20th seed Romania, third seed Norway and 10th seed England for a tied-fourth finish before taking the sixth spot.

Norway, with just five wins, two draws and four losses, tumbled to the 59th spot. This remains Norway's worst finish in Carlsen's seven Olympiad appearances. Carlsen said before the Olympiad, "We have the strongest team that we have never had and we would be in contention to win a medal. This time around I am really, really excited about that prospect."

In nine rounds, the World No. 1 won six and drew three for a performance rating of 2803 that earned him the bronze medal on the top board, behind Gukesh and Abdusattorov. If Carlsen lost three rating points, his other four team-mates lost in double-digits. A truly forgettable performance for the Norwegians in the Open section.

On one count, Carlsen's gut feeling came true. "I am very much impressed with the second team of India which has many of the best young players in the world. I definitely think that they have a chance to be among the medal winners."

As it turned out, India 2 outdid India 1 and Gukesh emerged as the star performer of the Olympiad. He won the first eight rounds and added two draws from the last three rounds. He brought his fine form into the competition and proved an ideal spearhead of a young team.

Nihal, Praggnanandhaa, Raunak Sadhwani and B. Adhiban played their parts well and slowly the hopes rose from a medal to a possible gold. With India 2 raising hopes of a possible 3-1 victory over Uzbekistan, the gold medal appeared well within India's grasp. But that was not to be.

Gukesh, from an overwhelmingly strong position, tried hard to press home the advantage against Abdusattorov in their top-board battle. In his desperation, he allowed his gritty rival some counter-play and did not see that his advantage was fast shrinking. He continued to play for a win. From the team's perspective, even a draw was good enough to keep India 2 ahead of Uzbekistan and Armenia after the penultimate round. Tragedy struck when Gukesh overreached and blundered to lose.

The resultant 2-2 draw meant that Uzbekistan stayed one-point ahead in the company of Armenia.

It was rather harsh to hold the 16-year-old responsible for the slip-up. In the previous matches, Gukesh's victories set the pace on most occasions for India 2 and brought confidence to his team-mates on the lower boards. Who could forget Gukesh's em-

Final standings

1-2. Uzbekistan, Armenia (19 match-points each), 3. India 2 (18), 4-6. India 1, USA and Moldova (17 each), 31. India 3 (14).

Individual prizes:

Board 1: 1. D. Gukesh (Ind 2), 2. Nodirbek Abdusattorov (Uzb), 3. Magnus Carlsen (Nor).

Board 2: 1. Nihal Sarin (Ind 2), 2. Nikolaos Theodorou (Gre), 3. Nodirbek Yakubboev (Uzb).

Board 3: 1. David Howell (Eng), 2. Arjun Erigaisi (Ind 1), 3. R. Praggnanandhaa (Ind 2).

Board 4: 1. Jakhongir Vakhidov (Uzb), 2. Paulius Pultinevicius (Ltu), 3. Jaime Santos Latasa (Esp).

Reserve: 1. Mateusz Bartel (Pol), 2. Robert Hovhannisyan (Arm), 3. Volodymyr Onyshchuk (Ukr).

phatic victory over Fabiano Caruana in the team's stunning 3-1 victory over USA.

In contrast, India 3 could not punch above its weight. With six wins and two draws, the team finished 31st as against its starting rank of 16.

On the top board, a winless veteran Surya Shekhar Ganguly failed to inspire as he contributed only 3.5 points from 10 outings. On the third board, another experienced campaigner Abhijeet Gupta scored 3.5 points from seven games. Younger Grandmasters S. P. Sethuraman (7.5/11) and Abhimanyu Puranik (6/8) played their hearts out. M. Karthikeyan (5.5/8) had his moments.

Top performers

D. Gukesh (India 2, top board, gold medal): A string of eight straight victories had the chess world take a closer look at this talent. Performing at the biggest stage, the 16-year-old Chennai boy brought down some of the better-known names. He plays all positions with equal elan and possesses a sharp eye in complex situations. He fears none and it came as no surprise that some of the world's finest names spoke highly of his talent. Given Gukesh's refreshing attitude to the sport and relentless pursuit to win, he surely holds the prospect of being the flag-bearer of Indian chess.

B. VELANKANNI RAJ

Nodirbek Abdusattorov (Uzbekistan, top board, silver medal): The reigning World rapid champion is already a big name in the shorter format of the game in the premier online events. At 17, Abdusattorov has the reputation of finding moves even in the most difficult situations. He seldom offers draws or agrees to one. Much like Carlsen, he likes to grind his opponent and force errors late in the fourth or fifth hours of play. He is a new-generation champion whose uncompromising style of play has left a number of veterans severely worried about their prospects against him. Surely, Abdusattorov has it in him to break new grounds.

FIDE / STEV BONHAGE

Nihal Sarin (India 2, second board, gold medal): Nihal produced an unbeaten performance, winning five times in 10 appearances. He also proved equal to Levon Aronian as the team pulled off the biggest upset of the competition. After a lull, Nihal straightaway found form in the Olympiad. Nihal seldom got an inferior position and that reflected his fine preparation. Four out of five victories came with white pieces, including the final-round triumph against higher-rated Matthias Bluebaum of Germany. The presence of Nihal on the second board meant India 2 looked increasingly invincible. He reminded the chess world of his calibre and class with immaculate calculation and superb execution of plan.

B. VELANKANNI RAJ

RAKESH RAO

The suspense preceding the announcement of the final results was proving to be too long and agonising. The top two places were reserved by Ukraine and Georgia but bronze for India 1 was the point of interest. Finally, India 1 did get on to the podium and made history by gaining its first-ever medal from the women's Chess Olympiad.

A few hours earlier, the India 1 quartet of K. Humpy, R. Vaishali, Tania Sachdev and Bhakti Kulkarni entered the playing hall as the final-round leader. A one-point lead over Ukraine and Georgia meant even a draw against USA was enough for gold, such was the tie-breaker points the host had.

But soon into the final round, Tania and Bhakti got into serious trouble. Their unbeaten record till this point looked threatened. Humpy and Vaishali did not have any decisive advantage. That meant a loss for India 1 looked increasingly evident. Eventually, a struggling USA upstaged the top-seeded Indian combination 3-1, with losses to Tania and Bhakti providing the margin.

Suddenly, from a position where a win or a draw was good enough to ensure the gold,

INDIAN WOMEN MAKE HISTORY

In the absence of Russia and China, the host began as the favourite though there was very little to choose among India 1, Ukraine and Georgia.

India 1 was no longer assured of even a bronze. Though some arbiters brushed aside the fear that India would miss out on a medal, the final announcement of the medallists brought some solace to the host.

The Indian women had their first medal and the host could show a medal from both sections, which was another first.

With India 1 taking the fourth spot in the Open section and the women finishing third, the team claimed the Gaprindashvili Cup, symbol of a team's supremacy in both sections.

Eventually, the top three seeds traded spots on the podium. Second seed Ukraine and third seed Georgia finished with 18 points and occupied the top two spots. Favourite India 1 pipped USA and Kazakhstan on tie-break points to take the bronze after aggregating 17 points.

The world saw this triumph for Ukraine in the background of the ongoing situation in that country. Though the Muzychuk sisters — Mariya and Anna — held firm on the

Scripting success: The Indian women's team had its maiden podium finish, a bronze. Ukraine and Georgia won the gold and silver medals respectively. PTI

top two boards and contributed six and seven points from 10 games each, it was the unbeaten Anna Ushenina on the third board who proved the key to Ukraine's success.

Ushenina scored 7.5 points from nine rounds. Her match-winning effort against Germany in the 10th round truly kept Ukraine in contention for a medal. Unlike the Muzychuk sisters who lost rating, Ushenina gained 16 points following her sterling show.

For Georgia, the trio of Nana Dzagnidze, Nino Batsiashvili and Lela Javakhishvili took a day's rest by turns on the first three rounds and then played without a break. Batsiashvili was the pick among them, scoring 7.5 points from 10 rounds, including six victories.

In the absence of Russia and China, the host began as the rating favourite though there was very little to choose among India 1, Ukraine and Georgia. Humpy was the obvious spearhead and Harika insisted on being part of the team despite being in the late stage of pregnancy. While Humpy took time to find her bearings, Harika looked solid as she drew seven games on the trot between Round 3 and 9. Effectively, this experienced duo barely gave anything away on the leading boards.

It was the trio of R. Vaishali, Tania Sachdev and Bhakti Kulkarni that provided the home team with moments of repeated joy. Though they lost a game each, their ability to consistently find winning combinations proved most heartening.

Vaishali, a debutant, contributed 7.5 points on the third board while Tania, seen more as a commentator for elite events than a player since the pandemic broke out, scored eight points. The two girls went on to collect bronze medals on boards three and four.

Bhakti Kulkarni, a reserve, won the first three rounds and made a winning return in round 10. Tania and Bhakti, however, could not maintain their unbeaten run once the team ran into USA on the final day.

Poland and Kazakhstan were seen as teams with an outside chance for a medal. Not surprisingly, the fear of India 1 came true following a 1.5-2.5 defeat in the ninth round. When India played Kazakhstan the following day, a 3.5-0.5 win for the host was truly impressive.

India 2, headed by young Vantika Agrawal, came eighth to finish above its starting rank of 11th. Indeed, it was Vantika's 7.5 points from 11 rounds and reserve player Divya Deshmukh's seven from nine rounds that kept India 2 afloat.

For her efforts, Vantika gained an International Master norm while Divya collected a bronze for playing as a reserve on the fourth board.

Lost in the background were the steady showings of Padmini Rout — winner of an individual gold medal in 2014 — and the experienced Mary Ann Gomes. On the second board, Padmini found her form after five successive draws and then after a round's break, scored a hat-trick of wins. However, she finished with a loss. Mary, steady as ever, scored 6.5 points from nine unbeaten rounds.

Soumya had a forgettable outing despite starting with a hat-trick of wins. She lost her last two games and was rested for the last four rounds.

India 3, seeded 16, finished 17th with P.

Final standings

1-2. Ukraine, Georgia (18 match-points), 3-5. India 1, USA, Kazakhstan (17 each), 8. India 2 (16), 17. India 3 (15).

Individual prizes:

Board 1: 1. Pia Cramling (Swe), 2. Eline Roebers (Ned), 3. Abdumalik Zhansaya (Kaz).

Board 2: 1. Nino Batsiashvili (Geo), 2. Anna Muzychuk (Ukr), 3. Khanim Balajayeva (Aze).

Board 3: 1. Oliwia Kiolbasa (Pol), 2. Anna Ushenina (Ukr), 3. R. Vaishali (Ind 1).

Board 4: 1. Bat-Erdene Mmungunzul (Mon), 2. Maria Malicka (Pol), 3. Tania Sachdev (Ind 1).

Reserve: 1. Jana Schnieder (Ger), 2. Ulviyya Fataliyeva (Aze), 3. Divya Deshmukh (Ind 2).

V. Nandhidhaa on the second board scoring 8.5 from 11 rounds and collecting 33 rating points.

Though the vastly experienced Eesha Karavade did reasonably well on the top board by contributing six points from 11 rounds, the lower boards paid the price for lacking experience. Varshini Sahithi (4/7), Pratusha Bodda (5/9) and Vishwa Vasnawala (3.5/6) fared as per expectations and lost rating points in double-digits.

Overall, unlike the Open section, the results in the women's section were far more predictable. India 1 did win a medal but was left to rue the missed opportunity to win a gold.

All credit to Harika for her unbeaten stint despite the challenges on the health front. Vaishali and Tania collected a second bronze for their individual performances while Divya made her debut a memorable one.

Top performers

Pia Cramling (Sweden, board one, gold medal): At a time when medallists in chess are becoming younger and younger, Pia set a new record. The 59-year old legend from Sweden won her third individual gold medal 44 years after making her Olympiad debut. She scored 9.5 points from 11 rounds but the 34th seed Swede could not finish higher than 40th spot. Pia, the fifth woman to gain the title of the Grandmaster, was ranked No. 1 among women in January 1984 and she went on to win her first individual gold medal in the Olympiad later that year. Pia added a second gold medal from the 1988 edition.

THE HINDU PHOTO LIBRARY

Oliwia Kiolbasa (Poland, board three, gold medal): Even as D. Gukesh caught the attention of the chess world by stretching his winning run to eight games, Oliwia (9.5/11) not only kept pace with the Indian teenager but also did one better. She won the first nine rounds to keep Poland's medal prospects alive. Though the team struggled to strike much on the top two boards, Oliwia and Maria Malicka (7/9 on the fourth board) provided the cutting edge to the sixth-seeded team. Rated 2376, Oliwia performed at a rating of 2565 despite losing the final round. In fact, it was her victory over Vaishali that gave Poland a 2.5-1.5 verdict over India 1.

B. VELANKANNI RAJ

R. Vaishali (India 1, board three, bronze medal): "The quality of her play was very high and I have no doubt, very soon she will become a Grandmaster," is how Humpy described Vaishali's role for India 1. As a debutant, Vaishali scored 7.5 points from 11 rounds while moving from board three to two, whenever mother-to-be Harika took rest. It was commendable how she dealt with the pressure and for that, a lot of credit is due to her coach R. B. Ramesh. As it turned out, Vaishali and her brother Praggnanandhaa collected a team bronze and an individual bronze each. Truly a unique achievement for these talented siblings.

B. JOTHI RAMALINGAM

Well begun, well done

Despite the time constraint to put together an event of such a magnitude in around four months, the Tamil Nadu government raised the bar to such a high that Budapest, which will host the 2024 edition, could find it tough to come anywhere close to it.

RAKESH RAO

Colourful show: Artists perform during the closing ceremony of the 44th Chess Olympiad 2022 in Chennai on August 9. AFP

Usually, the hosting rights of a Chess Olympiad is given four years in advance. When Budapest bid to organise the 2024 edition, little did it know that it could well become a challenge of a different kind.

The way the All India Chess Federation (AICF), with whole hearted support from the Tamil Nadu government, organised the 43rd edition, it became clear to one and all that the next host would find it tough to match this effort.

Without doubt, despite the time constraint to put together an event of such a magnitude in around four months, the Tamil Nadu government raised the bar to such a high that Budapest could find it tough to come anywhere close to it.

The technical aspect of the organisation, of course, could get better but the overall staging scale seen in Chennai and the venue at Mahabalipuram will be hard to match.

The visiting players and officials from over 180 nations praised the organisation of the event. From the moment the team landed at the airport, the immigration clearance, the seamless transfer to the hotel, the variety of food on the menu etc left the players in awe.

The ready-to-help health workers and facilities were readily in place. Hundreds from the security forces may have appeared to be very strict but that was the need of the hour. The volunteers, around 400 in number, handled more than what they were trained to do. Coming from across age-groups, these volunteers are considered the pillars of such mega events and these helping hands left nothing to chance.

The scale on which the Opening and Closing Ceremonies were mounted were

clearly unprecedented. Despite the 90-minute travel from the hotels in Mahabalipuram to the Nehru Stadium in Chennai, those who attended these ceremonies found it was worth it.

Not surprisingly, the successful hosting of the event was not without its shares of glitches. After the Tamil Nadu government committed to spend over Rs. 100 crores for the event, somewhere along the way, the officers realised that they needed to take control of almost every aspect and left very little for the inexperienced office-bearers of the AICF.

Though it left AICF feeling a little stifled at times, eventually, the federation secretary Bharat Singh Chauhan acknowledged that the bureaucracy entrusted with the responsibility did a fabulous job. "I am very happy with the way the event turned out. I must congratulate honourable Chief Minister M. K. Stalin and his team of astute bureaucrats for the huge success of this event."

Once the TN government tightened the purse-strings, the AICF found it tough to keep the promises made to the office-bearers from its affiliates, pertaining to the hospitality during the event. This clearly left AICF officials exasperated and many state officials noticeably unhappy.

"When you have an event of this magnitude, it is natural to have moments of disagreement and discontent. Barring a few people from both sides, I must reiterate that almost every person gave it all for the pride of the state and our nation. That's why the result is loved by all our guests," said Sanjay Kapoor, the AICF president.

The World Chess Federation (FIDE) was pleased with the arrangements not only for the Olympiad but also its Congress that saw elections of the office-bearers for a four-year term.

A lot of credit is due to the presence of former FIDE CEO Geoffrey Borg who came down from Dubai to help AICF and TN officials meet the challenges of hosting this event.

The man behind the last couple of Olympiads, besides several FIDE events over 12 years, Borg worked tirelessly once he realised the AICF was behind schedule. Once the TN bureaucracy saw the value that Borg was bringing to the table, they dealt directly with him.

Within a day of the start, it was clear that TN officials had taken over the logistics of the venue. This was triggered off after the crowd management left a lot to be desired on the first day. Thereafter, things improved noticeably and eventually, each one across various points at the venue, understood what was expected from him/her.

Another standout feature was the way the staff of the venue for the event worked round the clock to ensure the success of this mega event. Overall, the conduct of the event, at all levels, including the much-awaited Bermuda Party, was top class.

Levon Aronian, who represented USA in this edition after being part of his home country Armenia in the previous edition, was asked midway through the event what was preventing USA from performing to its best.

Aronian's apt response was, "You know the event is so well organised that sometimes it's just that you get to relax. I mean, we swim every day, we have wonderful food, and the rooms are wonderful, so this is the problem when the event is organised too well."

He could not have put it any better.

SPORTOON

Bristol clearance

By C.G.S.Narayanan

Bristol is a clearance theme which remains as one of the oldest and most popular themes in problem chess. The definition of the theme as per 'Encyclopaedia of chess problems' is as follows-'A line piece moves along the line clearing it for a like-motion piece which follows it in the same direction. According to the purity of the aim principle, the clearing piece should not have any influence on the subsequent play, the sole purpose of the move should be only to clear the line for the follower'. The origin of this theme dates back to 1861 when a theme tourney was organized in the city of Bristol.Look at the pioneer Bristol three-mover below.

Frank Healy

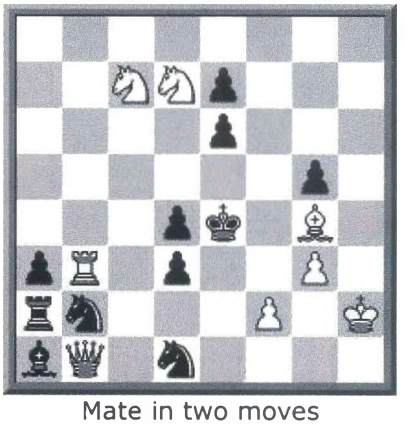
I Pr, BCA Ty, Bristol 1861

Mate in three moves

In spite of the heavy looking construction this problem is a difficult one to solve.In the diagram any move of BNb7 is met by 2.Qd6 and 1...Bc6 is followed by 2.Qxc6.After Bd7 or Be8 white has no continuation to follow. So white plays the surprising ambush clearance key **1.Rh1!!** and waits.1..Bd7/Be8 **2.Qb1!** taking control of b5 and b6 squares and threatening 3.Qb4.Now comes the defence 2...Bb5 (cutting off b6 guard)

WQ uses the line clearance done by WRd1 and mates with **3.Qg1.**

H.D.O.Bernard 1916



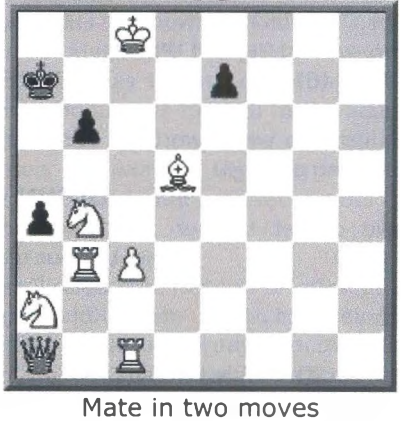
Mate in two moves

The second one above is a classic masked Bristol.There is correction play by the BNd1. 1...Nc3 2.Qh1 and black corrects 1...Ne3 2.f3 and 1....Nxf2 2.Qe1; 1...BNb2(masked piece) any 2.Qxd3;1...e5 2.Nc5 and now the key **1.Rb8!!** changes the mate for 1...BNb2 any to 2.Qb7. The rook loses guard of d3 while allowing clearance for the WQ to reach b7.

The Bristol in the two-mover below is not pure. Look at the definition given at the beginning of this article and try to find the reason.

V.Lider

HM,Cervonij girnil 1974



Mate in two moves

Solution to problem for solving in the article 'Defences on a square':

Key 1.Qc6! (2.Rg4+ Kf5 3.Qg6) 1..R(7)xe5 2.Bd6 3.Ne6;1...R(3)xe5 Qd6 3.e3;1...Qxe5 2.Qc7 3.Nd5.Pins by black are met by pins by white.

Readers may send in their queries to cgsnarayanan@hotmail.com